VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

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&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

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CHAPTER I.

THE STORM AMONG THE HILLS.

THE dusk of that November afternoon, two weeks before, was deepening rapidly, when Lina Chester woke to consciousness upon the grass beside the mountain lake, and rose slowly to her feet. Quick, almost as a lightning-flash, the past hour rushed back to her; and she stood in the solitude, bewildered and afraid, her cold hands pressed upon her temples, and her eyes wide and dark and desolate.

No one was within sight; no one in the whole wide extent of valley and hill-side. The silent water held its secret then, as safely as it held it

through the anxious months that followed, and she turned from it, shuddering in every limb. Where were they gone?

Slowly all—even of what she had *not* seen—grew clear to the girl's dazed mind; and then she turned from the water, and, with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse—not of personal fear or self-preservation, but of something stronger than either to the loving and brave-hearted girl—fled across the hills beyond the waterfall, fled rapidly, lightly, and without glancing back, as we only flee in a great dread.

Gradually the valley narrowed, shut in by the heavy, frowning hills; the dark firs rose gloomily against the Winter evening sky, or stood in dense blackness against the dim mountain side; the swollen brook, leaping here restively in its narrow bed, dashed on among the rocks in the narrowing ravine, with a sound that was weird in its strong reverberation. Closer and closer came the heavy rocks to hem her in, dark masses leaning now above the rugged path as if about to fall upon her. In

the deepening darkness, and the loneliness and silence, the girl at last grew frightened in her heart.

So tiny and powerless and helpless she felt, in this awful solitude, the hills gathering more and more closely upon her as she hastened breathlessly on. With a shivering of her eyelids, she stood and looked down upon the water, as it hurried away, seeming to seek, like herself—only in wisdom and in innocence, she felt —an outlet from this sombre bed. Only in wisdom and in innocence! Did the whole difference lie in that?

Long and intently, Lina gazed and wondered. Could any cry which she might utter, be heard in the world beyond the hills? Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, they stretched. Could a tired cry, even a dying cry, pierce beyond them? Or would it only echo and re-echo among the rocks around, waking weird answering voices that might form a fitting coronach? Was this grey, restless water deep enough to hide her, or would it rush on, and leave *something* lying there, to make the solitude even more

ghastly, and turn the silence even more horribly into the silence of death?

Covering her eyes at the thought, Lina turned from the brink of the noisy brook, and made her way once more along the rocky and uneven path. Her stiff, white lips were moving slowly, as if she fancied that, even in her isolation and helplessness; even in this immense loneliness, and with the shadow of a great guilt touching her, there was One who would hear those low-breathed words.

Would she ever reach a human habitation? If she were but at the top of the hill, she thought, she could breathe without this heavy, frightened pain; and she should find a cottage sooner perhaps. She had begun her flight with one longing only, thinking nothing of either fatigue or loneliness; but now another longing had come, and grew intense as she sped on and on. The longing to find refuge in a human habitation, before the utter darkness fell upon her, and she was left alone here in the tremendous loneliness, that nameless voice ever whispering to her the terrible word which had

seemed to pierce her heart, before she fell beside the treacherous mountain tarn.

She knew now that she was one of the few —thank Heaven, only the few!—who feel the full horror of that word, as we can never feel it, while we only hear it, or see it, again and again repeated in the newspapers.

Stifling that thought as quickly as she could, she climbed on, though the way was rugged and her feet unutterably weary. A mist was creeping now across the hills, and a light, swift rain began to fall. Bending her head against it as she climbed, she could advance but slowly. The mist came on, covering the distant hills. Only the dim outlines of the near ones were visible now, as she struggled on higher and higher, each step more difficult, and each minute the rain falling more heavily.

Behind, and far below her now, the chill grey water rushed on its course, its maddening and monotonous sound subdued and broken. Around her, through the mist, she saw sometimes the dim and shivering sheep huddled in twos and threes beneath a bare Winter tree.

Above her, she still saw the dim outlines of the nearer hills. A longing came upon Lina to scream; to scream at the very top of her voice; not so much in the vain hope of an answer as in the fierce desire of disturbing the indescribable weight of silence.

The wind was rising, and the rain increased rapidly as it did so. The stormy gusts tore through the fir-trees, and drove the rain before them, straight and pitilessly down upon the tired, stooping little figure.

Ah!—dear Heaven, kind Heaven—there was a light at last; a square of ruddy, cheery light, glimmering in a cottage window on before her. With the sure instinct born of a sore need, Lina made her way to the cottage door and knocked.

CHAPTER II.

SHELTER.

THERE was little need for Lina to tell her story in order to gain admission to the cottage. The old woman, its single occupant, who raised her light and let it fall upon the wan, frightened face, waited for no plea. She drew the girl to the glowing little fire, and, moved by that compassion which in its purity and unsuspiciousness comes straight from Heaven, had clasped warm, tender arms about her, when a sleep, that was deep and sudden as death, fell upon the weary girl, and blotted out her miserable heart-weariness.

Beside the little bed where she lay so white and helpless, the old woman watched alone; for

no doctor could be reached from the isolated mountain cottage, even if she could have left her patient to go in search of one. She was glad of this next day, when Lina, her great dark eyes so full of gratitude, yet of their old fear, too, moaned to her to let no one else come. So she watched and nursed alone, with that tempered strength which seems always lent to watchers beside a sick-bed; and at last memory came back; and life returned to the wan face that lay upon the hard, brown pillow.

"I wish," sighed the old woman to herself, "that that 'Rachel' she's been so often sobbing for when she didn't know it, could come, if only to comfort her, poor dear! But I couldn't go to find her, even if I knew where she was; and as I've managed so far, I'll try to manage till she's about again."

"I live most lonely here, my dear," she said to Lina one day, when the girl lay in the ease of returning strength. "I see no one from Monday to Saturday, except just once a month (one Saturday in every month), when I walk into Churchill to see my son, and get the money

he allows me, and do my bit of marketing for the month. You may fancy it's no light walk for me—nine miles good; and I have to start this weather as soon as ever it is daylight. Still I consider it my bit of holiday, and next Saturday's the day."

The delicate, pale lips quivered as Lina spoke, her thoughts running wildly on before her words.

"Are you not near a station?—I mean, could you not go by train?"

"I'm just two miles from a station, and nine miles from town," was the slow answer; "but I never hesitate, my dear; I never have been in one of those railway things, and never shall go. They're unnatural. I don't quite trust them."

"Yet you are not afraid of living in this lonely spot?" the girl said.

"No; it's always been natural to me, just as it's natural to the sheep to lie on the hill-side without fear. It isn't being alone I'm afraid of."

"Have you no neighbours," asked Lina, flushing vividly, as if the dim eyes and unsus-

picious heart could read the real motive of her questioning, "who come in here to have a chat with you, or to—to tell you the news from Churchill?"

"Just, perhaps, once in a while, my dear," was the cheery answer, "but not often, for I've none within a'most a mile, and I don't care about it. I can live very snugly without any news. I hear it all when I go into Churchill. I shall hear it all on Saturday."

The scarlet crept higher and higher on Lina's face—the beautiful face that had lain for days so white and still—and she nervously tried to hide it.

"I have had one neighbour in since you've been here, my dear," the old woman continued, almost soothingly, "but I didn't tell of you being here at all. I wouldn't, till I knew you wouldn't mind it."

The tears crowded to the girl's eyes at this kind thought.

"Oh, how good you are to me!" she cried; "and I can never repay you!"

"Hush, my dear, you'll grieve me sorely if you take to talk like that."

And then, in the real refinement of her Heaven-taught compassion, the old woman moved softly about the room, as if busy for herself, talking of other things, and drawing the girl's thoughts to feel that her presence in the cottage was brightening and cheering. And when the tired look would creep back into the worn face, and the feverish light to the wide eyes, she would find it necessary to go into the other room and leave the girl to rest alone. But what was this resting alone to Lina? With her face hidden and her thin fingers clasped, she only moaned to Heaven for pardon, because she must deceive another who had been kind and good and pitiful to her; and because she must abuse the simple trust which had been reposed in her, and had saved her.

It was Saturday morning, and by the light of a flickering candle, Lina's kind old nurse was preparing for her long walk into Churchill. Lina had risen as early as *she* had, and was helping

her deftly in this preparation, hovering about her with prompt and dainty little attentions, such as the old woman had never received before through all her seventy years.

"I wish you'd just lain still, my dear," she said, watching the girl's anxious face (which was pale to-day, she fancied, with even a new pallor); "I'd rather see you resting than troubling about here after me—I'm used to wait on myself. Why, bless me, I haven't had such a breakfast set and made for me I don't know when, if ever; nor am I used to having everything prepared to my hand in this way. But I can't bear to see you do it."

"I like to do it—so much," whispered Lina; "I couldn't lie in bed to-day—I'm so strong now. I like to do this best of all. I shall like to remember it."

"I suppose I'm ready now, my dear," said the old woman, laying a clean white cloth to cover the bottom of her basket, and wondering when Lina would turn her eyes fully to hers again; "and all I've got to ask is this; is there anybody in Churchill that will want to know—I

mean, my dear, have you any message to send by me? I'll take and learn it off, and give it just as you give it to me."

The dark, sad eyes met hers at last, yet still with a shrinking in their depths that almost looked like shame.

"I know you would," the girl said, gently, "but, kind nurse, I have no message to send, no one to send a message to."

Wistfully, almost humbly, as she spoke, Lina put her arms about the neck of the old woman who had so pitifully tended and sheltered her, and left a gentle lingering kiss upon the withered cheek.

"My dear," the woman whispered, in her astonishment, "take care of yourself to-day; I don't like to leave you, but there's no help for it. I'll be as quick as ever I can. Why are you dressed?"

"I'm coming with you a little way," said Lina, turning the key in the door as they left the cottage. "I dare say you never lock the door and take the key with you when you only go away for a few minutes, but I'm not so

brave as you are, and I shall feel more comfortable."

Again, upon the hill-side path, out of sight of the cottage, Lina kissed her kind old friend and said good-bye; and then she stood and watched her, until a turn in the rugged way hid them from each other.

"Thanking me so, makes a perfect baby of me," muttered the old woman, rubbing her dim eyes, "kissing me and thanking me as if I'd been—Well, well, it's no use thinking of it, and making myself look foolish all day. It will be pleasant to have her waiting there for me to-night. How many years is it since I had any one to welcome me at my home-coming? Ah, I could hardly count the years. Perhaps she'll even come a little way to meet me in the gloaming."

This thought kept recurring to her happily all through her nine miles' walk; but she uttered no word of it when she reached her son's house and met his questions. Loitering beside her, and jestingly discussing her probable pur-

chases, he moved the cloth which covered the bottom of her basket.

"Why, mother," he exclaimed, as he did so, "it isn't like you, to have the key of your house loose here? Where's your safe under-pocket?"

"The what—the what, lad?" she cried, a sick faintness seeming to seize her. (The lad to her was a wrinkled, gray-haired man to others).

"The key of your cottage, generally so snugly packed in an out-of-the-way pocket," he said; "you must have been very careless this morning."

The marketing that day was done at random. Even the little present for Lina (about which so much kind anxiety had been felt) was forgotten. No thought had the kind old woman that was half so urgent a one as the thought that she must hasten home and open the cottage door for the girl whom she had nursed back to health, and who, weak and delicate still, was locked out of the house now, with no chance of warmth, or food, or resting-place. How came the key to

have droppped from her hand into the basket?

The long walk was over at last; the locked-up cottage was within sight, and now the dim eyes looked around, eagerly searching among the shadows. Ah! this was to have been such a pleasant home-coming. No young figure disturbed the solitude of the old familiar scene. No voice answered to her faint, troubled call. The rooms, when she entered them, had become the solitary empty rooms of old times; the solitary empty rooms which—she said to herself with a tired glance around—of course they would always be.

CHAPTER III.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE.

THE third-class train to London passed the village station at eight o'clock, so Lina had an hour for her two miles walk. She had watched her kind nurse out of sight, through hot tears; her last glance had rested on the little cottage where she had been so kindly welcomed, and she walked on rapidly in the dim morning twilight.

The village station looked dismal enough, with yesterday's ashes in the grates, and yesterday's dust and rubbish lying undisturbed as yet. There were several third-class passengers waiting; some wearing the wan, dull look which she knew she wore herself; others busy and excited,

claiming prompt acquaintance with each other, just as if another station would not separate them again, perhaps for ever.

Quite silently Lina sat in a corner of the dusty carriage, when the train at last rolled slowly on towards London, while noisy voices about her talked of things which came so near her own frightened thoughts that her very heart ached as she waited breathlessly for what might follow.

The glass was dull enough, but Lina gazed through it into the mist of the November morning, dreading to turn her head. On they went, a little faster now, through ploughed fields where the upturned soil and the men and horses all had the same dull hue which the sky reflected. It was quite a relief presently to pass a group of workmen standing on the edge of the line, in their white blouses. On again, past grey fields, grey lanes, grey cottages. Once, when in the midst of one of these grey fields, she saw a little silent pool on which the brown bulrushes leaned and faded, she shivered with a horrible remembrance. And when the cold, bright sun pierced through the clouds at last, and the fir-

trees stood up like columns against the brightening eastern light, memory came back, bringing those fir-trees on the mountain. Ah! could that one memory ever again be absent from her mind?

The slow third-class train deposited its passengers at Euston, and became, for a time, a useless piece of station furniture. Through the London streets (timidly and shrinkingly, as she had trodden them just once before) Lina walked in the dusk which gathers there so early on a November afternoon. Some who met her noticed pityingly the sadness of her young white face; but they were the few. The many passed on, busy and engrossed as is the crowd of London, beyond the crowd of any other city.

"Conduit Street—number seven—at last," murmured the girl to herself, as she stopped before the familiar door. "I knew the number was right upon my letter to Rachel. I wonder why she did not answer."

"Miss M'Mullen?" repeated the servant who answered Lina's ring. "Oh, she left here months ago. I believe she went to Arthur

Street; you know it—out of Oxford Street. I'm not sure about the number, but I think it's twenty; you may as well try twenty, at any rate. It'll do no harm if you're wrong by a door or two. But I think it's twenty."

"Thank you," said Lina, earnestly. She knew London enough to know that even such civility and assistance as this, was not always to be met with, and then she turned wearily away.

Along George Street she went as quickly as she could, trembling with an inexplicable sudden nervousness as the statue rose before her, dim and gigantic in the twilight. Passing through Hanover Square she loitered a little; its hush and emptiness were like a rest and protection to her. Whether she might be going the most direct or most indirect way she did not know, she only knew that in this way she could reach Arthur Street eventually; could reach it and Rachel—and she tried to make that thought dispel all fear.

Oxford Street at last. Arthur Street lay a long way eastward, a long, long way of daz-

zling glare, of jostling and of crushing, a long, long way, made more bitter by whispered remarks and quizzical salutes. An endless way she was beginning to think it, when a policeman pointed out to her the turning she sought.

Into the quiet side street she hurried, as into a refuge, but a few steps brought her to the edge of a noisy, surging crowd. She must make her way past, and she did so, trembling with a nameless fear. Then she remembered happily that she should not have to pass it again. She should be with Rachel soon—safe and at rest with Rachel.

Ah, here was No. 19! One more—20! A quiet knock the girl gave, her heart beating heavily now that the end of her journey was so near. The answer to her question came this time even more depressingly than it had come before.

Miss M'Mullen had left there after one month; had gone to live lower down on the other side. She (the speaker) did not know the number, did not know whether Miss M'Mullen would be there now or not. She could not trouble where

all her lodgers went to, but it certainly was lower down on the other side.

Lina stood a moment after the door was shut, feeling very hopeless and bewildered. Then she roused herself. "Lower down on the other side." Not far away perhaps. She should only have a few more minutes to spend in doubt and weariness—then rest and safety with Rachel.

"If Rachel is not here?"—The vague, haunting doubt had forced its way at last through all her hope, and bravery, and confidence; and now it harassed and frightened her as it would, of its own fierce will.

"If there were no one to go to——" As the doubt took this cruel form, and would be battled with no longer, Lina instinctively sought for her purse.

"There was at least enough——"

A sudden stop in her slow walk; a sudden weakness and despair. She had no purse at all. Could it have been taken from her in the crowd? She could not tell; she only knew that she had had it at Euston, and that now it was gone.

"Penniless and alone—if Rachel is not here," she whispered to herself, in a dull, dazed agony.

"But—but Rachel *will* be here," she cried, trying to kill the other thought. "Oh, she must be here! What was it? Where was it? Lower down—on the other side."

So lower down she went, and crossed the street. A last desperate courage had come to the girl, and she knocked at one door after another, with her urgent, oft-repeated question. And as she turned from each, her heart cried out, in its agony, for this one friend who had taken her in and comforted her in another far-back time of misery almost like this.

"Miss M'Mullen? Yes, I know her." (Ah, the longed-for answer at last)! "I'm sure to know her, for she lived here some bit—and a decent, respectable woman she was. But she fell ill, and I couldn't have her any longer—not I, unless I could have afforded to lose all my other lodgers. So she went——"

"Where?" faltered Lina. "Can you tell me where? Is it far from here? A long walk will it be?"

The woman looked curiously, even suspiciously, into the weary, dazed eyes.

"Why, bless me!" she exclaimed, "are you a friend of hers, and don't know where they took her? To hospital, of course—Guy's, I remember—and there she died almost directly. There, I'm called; it's always the way. You must excuse my shutting the door."

The street was a dull, prosaic street, yet it seemed as if the last scene of a life-tragedy were to be enacted now in one of its shadowy spots, where a frail, shivering figure leaned faint and sick, against the post of a closed door.

Weary, starved, and penniless! Weary, yet with no hope of rest before her; starved, yet at no fireside could she either claim or buy a place; penniless in the heart of the great, abundant city, where everything could be procured for money, and nothing could be procured without it.

Up into the gleam of gaslight opposite, came some one with a firm, slow, almost cautious step; up straight towards Lina, but very slowly.

There was no need of haste. He had follow-

ed her for miles, and knew how wearily she walked. So he crossed the street but slowly—a gentleman with a warm, handsome face and in a warm, handsome dress.

Weak and small and fragile the girl looked, leaning there in the shadow, and the tall, strong figure staggered an instant at this glimpse of her; then as his hands, in their warmth and eagerness, went out to meet her, the hurt, proud pain gave place to a pitying protecting love upon his handsome Saxon face, and made it almost noble.

And the mental darkness which had been falling on Lina Chester vanished suddenly in the lightning flash of a new and terrible fear, when she saw that she was standing face to face with Sir Neil Athelston.

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

LINA stood an instant, facing Sir Neil, with that proud shrinking in her eyes which he had seen before—he most of anyone; but her will and power were weak and tired, his strong and firm, and so, almost before she was aware, she was driving rapidly through the lighted streets, and Sir Neil was opposite her in the cab. The cab was small, and the space limited, hence he was close beside her, as she knew; yet—as she did *not* know, for the other thought was all in all to her—he was really as far from her as he could possibly be.

He could not help but see how unwelcome

his presence was, and he had the delicacy not to force it upon her unnecessarily. So he leaned forward in his corner, looking from the damp glass out upon the uninteresting prospect it disclosed, while he longed with an ardent longing to throw his strong, warm arms about the little trembling figure opposite him.

The horse was pulled up suddenly before the station door, and Sir Neil got down and paid the fare at once. Then he offered his hand to Lina.

There was something new in his manner and bearing to-night; something which made her rise without a word, and step down upon the pavement to him. She did not understand what it was—perhaps she did not care to try—but it made her leave the cab at his silent bidding, and wait for him; though she had scornfully passed his proffered hand, and was standing now as far from him as she could. He only allowed her a few moments to do so; he had paid the man, and so was free to join her at once.

"This way, Miss Chester, please."

That was all he said, slackening his steps to hers as she slowly turned, and so they walked together through the vestibule, and out upon the platform, to the door of the ladies' waiting-room.

"There's a splendid fire!" said Sir Neil, as cheerily as he could. "Try to keep yourself warm and snug for half an hour here; we have that time to wait before we start. I am sorry; waiting is always such disagreeable work."

They had halted at the door, and for the first time Lina looked up full into her companion's face. He bent eagerly to catch her words.

"Start where?—start where?" she faltered. "I am not going—I cannot go. Oh! let me stay in London!"

"It is just as impossible," replied Sir Neil, a little huskily, "as that I could, with my own hands, lay you on the rails there when the train was coming."

"Oh! it is worse than that to have to go back!" sobbed the girl, brokenly. "Lay me there. It were far better than that—that they

should make me swear his life away. Oh! leave me here!"

Neil's answer to the confused words would hardly come. For the first time in his life he was weak with pity, and overcome by the longing to show a mercy which was foreign to him.

"When you have rested," he said, very gently, but still acting only as he chose, "you will see what an impossible request you make. You would have need to execrate me all your life if I left you here alone in London."

"Oh! I would rather," moaned Lina, too weak now even to sob; "I would so much rather stay here!"

"We are going home, dear little girl," he said, sorrowfully gazing into her entreating face, and addressing her (in his new character of protector) as he would have addressed a child, "and it will be all right for you then."

"Home!" she cried, with a sudden shiver; "I have no home. Every home that is given *me* is taken from me again. I have no home to go to; I only want to be away from *there*."

"But will you not trust those whose only wish——"

"You have always been cruel to me," she interrupted, desolately; "you are cruellest of all now."

"You are tired," he said, quite tenderly, but with no thought of giving up his own desire; "you do not see it all as you will see it to-morrow morning. Come; here is a snug sofa close to the fire."

In his new and easy assumption of authority, he made her rest there, putting his own fur rug about her; and then he went away, returning in a few minutes with a tumbler of hot wine and water, and a plate of delicately cut sandwiches. Other ladies sat about the room, but, even with their eyes upon her, Lina could not take the plate. She did put her cold lips to the glass, but hardly for more than an instant. Half-a-dozen eyes followed Sir Neil as he left the room again, and then turned inquisitively to the girl's beautiful pale face.

"On their wedding tour, and she's been taken ill. How unpleasant!"

"A petted and pampered girl, who likes the *rôle* of invalid in public, to exhibit the devotion of her handsome, strong young husband."

"Not married, and never will be. Well, she's pretty enough for anything."

These the three remarks consequent on the scrutinizing of the six eyes, and about as true as are most of the blind remarks made upon fellow-travellers in the totally unsuggestive atmosphere of a waiting-room, enduring those interminable minutes between trains coming and trains going.

"Now, Miss Chester, this is our train."

Lina was leaning back in the corner of a couch, looking before her with eyes that saw nothing of this room and its occupants, when Sir Neil's quiet words aroused her. He had taken up the rug and thrown it over one arm, the other was offered her. Her steps tottered feebly as she rose—after the rest, the weariness was more evident than before—but still she passed the offered hand again, and walked from the room as steadily as she could.

Once more, away from those staring eyes, she entreated to be left. But this entreaty was as unavailing as the last had been.

"Your seats, sir. I've taken care of them."

The porter, who had had the "grandee" in his eye all through the previous half-hour, came forward now, fearing that if the lady lingered there, the train might, after all, go without them. Such a pity as that would be after taking four tickets!

In the farther corners of the carriage at which Sir Neil and Lina stopped, two ladies sat luxuriously buried in shawls and rugs; two quiet, experienced lady travellers.

"Now, lock the door," said Sir Neil, slipping a half-crown into the man's hand, when he and Lina were in and he had again made her comfortable in his furs; "I have taken the rest of the carriage."

"I know, sir," put in the guard, coming up and turning the key; "I'm aware, sir. Have you all you need?"

"All right," curtly replied Sir Neil, who had piled the hot-water tins one upon another for a high foot-stool for Lina.

"Churchill you said, didn't you, sir? There's no need to bother you again until then. The other ladies go still farther north."

"Yes," answered Neil, who had taken care to ascertain this fact before he took Lina's place.

Then he settled himself in his seat and opened the evening paper; and, somehow, as they sped on, Lina grew conscious how thoughtfully he was taking care of her through this journey. The presence of the ladies prevented any reference to exciting themes, and was, too, just the companionship she wished; yet it was a relief to her to know that no one else could join them, and no inquisitive eyes probe her as those had done at Euston. It was a great relief to her, too, that Sir Neil still lounged in his own seat, with his old lazy *insouciance*, the lappets of his high sealskin cap down over his ears,

and the paper still held between his eyes and hers.

It was not until the night journey was nearly over that suddenly all this thought was effaced for a moment only by one chance glance at the quiet Saxon face. Oh! why was she there with him, going to help to kill Gerard? He was cruel to have brought her with him—cruel, as he always had been to her. He knew she was alone and unprotected. He knew she was in his power, and he had sought her out to give her the bitterest task of all her bitter life. He had been cruel to her always—always; even more cruel than he had been to everyone else; selfish and heartless. He! The affianced husband of a lady a thousand times better and nobler and truer than himself; the son of the mistress who had paid her for her services just as she paid her servants; the man who had begged her to accompany him from his own house, where he was even then entertaining his betrothed wife! *He* to protect her now!

Care! what care had anyone for her? Ah!

if Rachel had only been spared! If Heaven did not always claim the good and merciful, and leave those who had no pity and compassion!

Athwart this dark, rebellious thought, there fell soft rays of light for Lina. She recalled the old woman in her cottage among the hills. She recalled Marjorie's warm, trustful sympathy. She recalled Colonel Stuart's goodness to her and to Gerard; but this thought bordered so closely on her one overmastering fear, that she hid her face in the corner of the carriage, and wept for the first time through all the hours of that interminable day.

Not one movement did Neil make towards her through this silent weeping, though it hurt and pained him as no woman's weeping had ever pained him in his life before. Not one word did he attempt of consolation or sympathy, and, for the first time, he acted with a real thoughtfulness in his courtesy,

"Churchill."

The name that had grown familiar to Lina

through the past Summer, struck on her ear now like a knell.

"That's right," said Sir Neil, with an effort at cheeriness, as he rose and took the wraps gently from about Lina. "It is only just midnight now, Miss Chester; a tiresome journey, but it hasn't taken us very long, and—I declare here's Mrs. Esdaile."

The tone was the same tone throughout the speech, to all seeming light and cheering, though in reality anxious and troubled; but at the last words, uttered in feigned surprise, Lina's whole face brightened with a swift, sudden gladness; momentary only perhaps, but so vivid that Neil, when he saw it, rejoiced in his heart that he had had the thought to telegraph to Stuart from Euston.

"I am so glad to have been here, Miss Chester," said Mrs. Esdaile, warmly taking her by the hand. "Sir Neil, you must tell Lady Athelston I have taken present possession of this tired girl. We have a much shorter drive before us than you have; besides, our brougham is here, and you will have to take a fly; and be-

sides," added the lady, with her pleasant tact, "I have Marjorie staying with me to-night at the Anchorage, and she would never forgive me if she heard I had met Miss Chester and not brought her to see her."

At the sound of Marjorie's name, Lina's clasp on Mrs. Esdaile's arm grew closer. "It seemed," as she said to her brother afterwards, "like an appeal from the girl to be taken to Marjorie, and for a moment overcame the evident dread she felt of advancing even one step nearer to us who had brought her here, to meet what she shuns far more than death itself."

Sir Neil Athelston stood at the door of the brougham, talking quietly to Mrs. Esdaile on indifferent subjects. His eyes, every now and then, sought Lina's with swift intentness, and as they rested on her face (so pitifully pale in the lamplight) there grew in them that look of anxious earnestness which could chase entirely their old sleepiness.

"You are sure you will not come, Athelston?" inquired Colonel Stuart, preparing to take his

seat on the box, confident, before he asked, what the answer would be.

"Quite sure, thank you, Stuart. I shall see you to-morrow. Good night, Mrs. Esdaile; thank you for—I mean, I'm very glad you chanced to be at the station. Good night, Miss Chester—good night."

And Sir Neil turned away, curbing his fierce, strong wish to linger still beside her; to have her under his protection longer; to claim the right of the one who had rescued her from her loneliness and danger. Dull and moody enough he felt as he drove home, in the very fly from the "Leopard" which had taken himself and Lina on the night when he first met her.

Cold and bleak as the night wind blew, Colonel Stuart faced it from the box-seat of his roomy brougham, leaving his sister to cheer Lina as her gentle, womanly tact and delicacy should prompt, and to say only just those few well-timed words which the girl could bear.

Lina listened gratefully, though she could not trust herself to speak. Here, beside her, was one new compassionate friend. In the warm,

peaceful home to which they were taking her, Marjorie awaited her—Marjorie, with her generous sympathy and gentle words. Ah, and she had murmured once, not long ago—not long ago, though it seemed like years and years—against Heaven's pity on the desolate!

All Gerard's brave and simple faith was hers just then. Even the dread of that coming trial left her for a little time. Sitting quite silent, her fingers locked in her lap, these thoughts of gratitude were so deeply heart-felt that they crept softly up into the starlit heaven like a prayer.

"Lina," said Marjorie, as the two girls sat before the fire in the pretty little room which had been prepared for Lina, "it's very late—I mean it's exceedingly early; but you are resting nicely on that big chair, aren't you? And I'm resting nicely here, so we won't hurry to separate just this minute. I expected that Mrs. Esdaile would make me promise not to come in here at all to-night, but she didn't, so I shall wait till it strikes one. Wasn't it a kind thought of Colonel—of Adelaide's, to send for me, Lina?"

"Very kind to me."

"You know I didn't mean that," was Marjorie's quick answer. "You know I meant that it was kind to *me*. Oh, Lina, if we could have helped it, you should not have returned—yet; but, as you are come, it is so much best for you to be here, and I am glad to be with you. I have missed you sorely through all these long days."

"May I tell you of them?" asked Lina.

Now Marjorie Castillain, though she looked so thoroughly comfortable and at home, wrapped in her dressing-gown, and with her slippered feet upon the fender, had her whole mind bent on solacing and cheering this solitary girl, and, anxious as she was herself, hid this that she might succeed the better. She had not misinterpreted the pleading look which Lina had given her when she fancied they were separating for the night—it was seldom that the clear eyes did misinterpret any look of appeal—and her sure, true instinct told her what the mute prayer had been. Lina wanted to tell her where and how these two weeks had been spent.

Perhaps, after that, another question—nearer her heart, but farther from her lips,—would come more easily.

Yes, truly it did! When Lina had finished her short story—so much more sad and pathetic a one than she fancied—she turned to Marjorie, and asked this question in a whisper, with dry lips and hot, eager eyes,

"Miss Marjorie, what did they say—the magistrates, the sheriff, your sister? What was it? What was said of him? What was the—verdict?'

"The verdict will not be given yet, dear," replied Marjorie, her own face paling; "we have a long, long time to wait for that. Oh, a weary time! If we could only leap through these three months, how willingly would I forfeit them from my life!"

"Perhaps it is better so," whispered Lina, in a voice from which all hope and spirit seemed to have died. "Then, Miss Castillain, is he—oh, *you* say it—where is he?"

"In Bleaborough," said Marjorie, and the effort to speak cheerily was an utter failure now.

"You mean in gaol?" was Lina's question, cold and slow in its anguish.

"Colonel Stuart goes to see him often, Lina," continued Marjorie, avoiding the direct answer, "and I'm going when you give me leave."

"Oh, no! How could he bear it?" cried Lina, in the same slow voice.

"Bear it!" echoed Marjorie, with a warm, bright flash in her loving eyes. "He would bear it as he bears everything—nobly, grandly, bravely. Oh, Lina, when I think of him now, my heart feels all hot and wrong and unbelieving. I think of that part of his life, years and years of a horrible degrading labour, then a struggling existence in that comfortless, almost empty cottage, and now a maddening confinement and inactivity. I think of how he has worked; worked always, always; and never for himself, never for any luxury, or even comfort for himself, worked to clear his name, which was never tainted, and worked for the child whom he rescued from poverty and worse; the child who, sharing all he so hardly earned, has never heard one harsh word from his lips. I think of the

woman who made his struggling life so much the harder to endure by her cankering, worrying temper, while all the time he had been the helper and consoler of her own child, and had given love and a home to her forsaken grandson. I think of the—the—of the man (I will say as little against him as I can, because he *may* be dead) to whom he owes this hard and solitary life, whose son it was he guarded, knowing him his son—*his* son! I think of how he worked and lived, Lina, always cheerful, always brave, always hopeful; yet never hearing one word of sympathy or encouragement, never having one loving glance to stimulate his earnest, busy hand. I think of all these things when I lie awake at night; or ride alone—as I've ridden miles and miles lately, to baffle Neil in his search for you; or sit alone staring into the fire, where I see it plainest of all; and it makes my heart burn as it never burned before. Everything seems confused; and—I want," added the girl, with great gentleness, "to tell him how the remembrance of his life has helped me in bearing——Ah, as if *I* had anything to bear!

The tiny clouds that fleck *my* sky are not troubles, I know it now; and I want to tell him of the one good which his story has taught me, because it was by his wish that it was told me."

"He will say you forget he is a prisoner—and for what?" faltered Lina, raising her hands to cover her wide, aching eyes.

"He will not be changed by those prison walls," returned Marjorie, with tearful earnestness. "No four bleak, cruel prison walls could change him. He *must* have the bright bravery in his eyes, and the strong gentleness in his voice. That wretched cell, however wretched, can no more take the manliness from him than could that bare cottage room take from him his inborn gentlemanliness. Lina, you see I know your story now—yours and his; and—and does it pain you to hear that, even to me in my random selfishness, your brother's story has done good?"

Ah, at last the tender words have done their work; for the tears are falling now quite thick and fast, from the tired eyes which had been so dry as she told her own tale.

"You know now, dear," resumed Marjorie, "that I have heard your story; but I think I trusted you so thoroughly, and loved you so well before, that I could not do it more. Lina, I promised him to take care of you if the power were ever given me. Colonel Stuart took the message; but I might easily promise what is such a pleasure to me, might not I?"

"I had meant to tell you our story to-night, Miss Castillain," said Lina, when the tears ceased, and she could speak again with calmness.

"And you see it is unnecessary," smiled Marjorie, with a warm, tender clasp about the slight, worn form; "Mr.——, your brother, asked Colonel Stuart to tell it me every bit. Colonel Stuart knew who he was always—all through the Summer; did you guess that?"

Lina started.

"He knew!" she echoed, wonderingly; "and he so good to us both, so—*very* good to Gerard."

"He is always good," returned Marjorie, quietly; "but of course he was good when he knew all. He had never believed that first ac-

cusation against Gerard. Mr. Esdaile didn't believe it afterwards, I understand. Mrs. Esdaile and Clara never had. Clara always loved you dearly, and often and often talked of you to her—husband. Colonel Stuart told me all this himself. Now I suppose I must go. I shall be scolded if I stay longer. Will you go to bed now, and don't think of rising in the morning until you have permission?"

"Miss Castillain," whispered Lina, looking up into her face as she rose, and speaking as if she felt the words a duty, "though Sir Neil *did* bring me back when I longed and prayed to stay, he—he did it very kindly and generously."

"Kindly and generously?" echoed Marjorie, the tone all scornful now, which had just been so soft and pitiful. "I'm sorry to hear he had the power even to do that. I hate to think of any power he has. You don't understand me, I see, but you will, poor child. I never thought of Neil's power until now; I should have laughed the idea to scorn if it had come before me. Now I am beginning to realise the power he

does possess in this money-loving, title-worshipping place. Lina, I literally shiver when I think of influence and authority being placed in his lazy, selfish hands; just because he is sheriff of the county, and the Baronet of High Athelston; while, for all we know, the real Baronet—oh, I cannot talk of that, it makes me sceptical and cross, and all kinds of wrong things. Hush, my dear, don't cry so piteously. You will wear yourself entirely out. Good night. Look at the timepiece, and promise me you will be in bed by two. Thank you, and so will I. Another kiss. Good night, dear little friend."

CHAPTER V.

WAITING FOR THE TRIAL.

ANOTHER illness was the forfeit Lina paid for that long day's wandering and anxiety; but tender hands led her back to health again, loving ones, too, though no ties of blood or relationship bound her to these true friends, any more than they had done to that old woman who had nursed her back to life, in the solitary cottage among the hills.

Marjorie was not staying at the Anchorage, "because the old folks at home find life unbearable without me," she told Lina, with the old merriment in her eyes, though they were dim with tears. So every day she went away, taking from the chamber where Lina lay, the bright-

est and the warmest sunbeam which ever found its way thither. Every day, after sitting with Lina as long as she dared, she went away from the house altogether. And Lina found this out, and pondered it a good deal between her own sad thoughts of Gerard; but she never grew to understand it.

"Mrs. Esdaile," Marjorie said, with wistful merriment one morning, as she came in and found her lovingly administering some delicacy to Lina, "I wonder what I should have suffered all this time if I had had my first stupid, involuntary wish, and taken Miss Chester to Hawkedale. I could never have provided dainties for her. Didn't you feel sure of that, when papa told you he had a cook 'just to his mind,' and when Louisa said 'she did pretty well' (that is strong praise for Louie)?"

"Marjorie," inquired Mrs. Esdaile, feeling, as Lina did, the sunniness of the girl's presence, however much she might be shocked by her occasionally heedless words, "how is Louisa now? I don't mean in the matter of general

health, or culinary opinions, but with regard to her melancholy and her——"

"Her mischief," put in Marjorie, demurely; "I understand. She's pretty well, thank you, in both respects. Louisa, as you may have remarked, has an extraordinary power of condensation. She is succeeding now in condensing into her six-and-twenty years all the mischief which it takes an ordinary woman her whole threescore and ten to concoct."

And then the conversation drifted, as it very rarely did, into the one prominent and most serious thought of them all.

"There is no hope, then, of Louisa's relenting?" inquired Mrs. Esdaile, anxiously.

"No hope," was the unwilling reply; "and Neil is as selfish as ever, and Lady Athelston as insanely obstinate as ever; as mildly, as self-punishingly obstinate as ever."

"Still cries, and says how much she has been deceived, eh?" asked Mrs. Esdaile, smiling at Lina. "Quite natural for her, but not the teaching of her better nature, and we will wait until that again is paramount."

So Lina, through those days she spent so quietly in her own room, was not kept in the dark about what was said in the little world round Churchill. But what was told her was told in kindness to herself, as well as by those who never spoke of their own deeds; so that, after all, the greater part was hidden.

She was never told of the hard feeling which prevailed in the place against her brother, or of the unceasing endeavours of Colonel Stuart and Marjorie to change this. She knew that Lady Athelston resented the deceit that had been practised upon her; but she had never been told what an attack of hysterics had seized her on Sir Neil's proposition that she should go to see Miss Chester, and how her very name was sowing dissension between the mother and son. She knew that Louisa Castillain was angry at her having been received back in Highshire at all; but she was never told of her untiring energy in pursuit of justice for Eustace Jelfrey's murderer; nor of the poisonous seeds of scandal against the murderer's sister, which she sowed broadcast with such pertinacious zeal. She

knew that Colonel Stuart was often with Gerard, and used all the influence he possessed in the county in his favour; but she did not know how weak that influence proved, now that the mighty voice of an injured public was raised against the prisoner; and while the High Sheriff published among them his *debonnaire* assurance of the coming sentence.

"It is wearisome work, Adelaide," the Colonel would say; "bnt I will not weary of trying, until it is too late for any effort to avail."

And his sister, smiling in proud confidence, would tell him that only one little turn was wanted, and then the scale of his influence —an influence which everyone knew to be good and pure—would weigh this down at once.

"Only one little turn!" he would echo. "But what is to give that little turn, my dear?"

"Truth itself, as Marjorie says," laughed his sister, gently, "clear-seeing, far-seeing, pure-seeing Truth itself."

So Lina, seeing all just in that one ray of

sunlight which kind friends let into her room, knew but little, after all, of the verdict uttered already by the busy world without.

When she got better, and was able to walk, Mrs. Esdaile and Marjorie took her away to Torquay; partly to recruit her strength, which was terribly wasted, and partly to strengthen her mental powers, which were oddly dazed and bewildered. Even when Mrs. Esdaile returned to her brother and little son, she left the girls there, with a friend of her own; and Marjorie was intensely grateful for this.

"It must have been a joint idea," she said to Lina. "It is too kind a one even for Adelaide to have concocted alone."

And Lina had no need to ask whom she credited with the other half.

Once during the visit, Sir Neil Athelston came down to spend a day there.

"Naturally," remarked Marjorie, when she had read the note he sent to tell her that he was then at the hotel, and ask when he might see her—"naturally he finds the separation from me tedious, unbearable. Poor martyr!

Lina, shall I read you my answer? Don't say *No;* I'm one of those small-minded girls who cannot exist without reciprocity. Listen—

"'MY DEAR NEIL,—I wish you were at John-o'-Groats or the Land's End—I shouldn't care which. Miss Chester is not well enough to enjoy seeing visitors, and I am too well. M. C.'

You see," she explained to Lina, raising her laughing eyes, "I had to think of an excuse for both, and so I employed the two opposites. Will that do?"

Lina laughed a little, and Marjorie had accomplished her aim. To lift sometimes the load of pain which was always pressing on the girl's heart, was Marjorie's one constant aim.

Sir Neil did call, as Marjorie knew he would. "Unnatural," he said, unconsciously parodying the words of his betrothed, "that we should be separated all this time, and I not allowed to come and see you." But (and this Marjorie had never expected) he did not force his company on her at all, and behaved to Lina with

an unobtrusive courtesy which (as Marjorie said to herself) almost amounted to thoughtfulness. And after that one visit, Sir Neil went back to Highshire, and troubled them no more.

"She will grow strong and well with Marjorie," he said to himself; "and I have seen her once again."

"Lina," said Marjorie, her eyes full of fun, "I've sent a message by Neil to ask the old folks at home to send me some Spring dresses and money; isn't it a joke? I've told him to send me a sketch of Louie's expression, or papa's, when he gives it. You know they would not vex *him* for all the world, nor provide me with filthy lucre; so won't their inclinations be dislocated? Dear," she added, suddenly, "did you want to send for anything?"

"No, thank you. Lady Athelston returned me my whole possessions at once," replied Lina, with a pained recollection of the dismissal which the act represented. "I am quite well supplied. I have—in that box she sent—all the money I—I had saved."

"I remember," whispered Marjorie; "saved for Gerard. What a pleasure that must have been, Lina! Oh! if I had a brother who loved me, I—I think I shouldn't mind my financial difficulties!"

And so the sad words ended in a little gentle laugh, as Marjorie tried that all their sad words should.

Colonel Stuart and little Jack came at last to fetch the girls home, and then there dawned that last day before the trial. How suddenly it seemed to come at last, after all the weary sighing for it, and counting the days that had to intervene!

Marjorie had been at the Anchorage all the afternoon, and the shabby phaeton had been sent for her. Then, in the darkness of the March night, James drove her away from the bright and happy home, where her thoughts still lingered.

"Marjorie, I thought I should see you. I have waited for you. Take my horse on, James, and I will drive your mistress."

It was Sir Neil Athelston who greeted

her thus, at the gate of the Anchorage, and who took his seat beside her, with his old ease and air of proprietorship.

"Let the old pony go as slowly as you like, Neil," she said, absently; "there is nothing very cheering awaiting me at home; and it is a very dismal morrow that will dawn upon this gusty night."

"I'm more than willing, dear," said Neil, taking the pony as sleepily as possible along the dark highway. "How is—how are they all, Marjorie?"

"Mrs. Esdaile has had tooth-ache for a few hours," returned the girl, with her old enjoyment of misunderstanding and provoking him, "but, fortunately, it is better now. Little Jack cut his finger about a week ago; but —don't you grow anxious about it?—under a strict diachylon *regime*, it has healed sufficiently for him to finish, with ease, a copy which I set him: 'Learning strengthens, refines, and elevates the mind.' But the cook is lying down with headache; caused, I fancy, by——"

"I don't want to hear about the servants," put in Neil, petulantly.

"I was just coming to the Colonel when you interrupted me. He has not, that I know of, called in professional advice; so I hope——"

"Bother!" growled the young man, without a smile. "I've seen Stuart to-day. Never mind telling me about him, Marjorie."

"You asked about them all," was the girl's calm rejoinder, "and so I began to tell you."

"How is Miss Chester?" he inquired, knowing quite well that she had read his thoughts from the first; and so attempting no more roundabout methods of reaching the truth.

"How can you expect her to be?"

Something in her voice, it must have been, which made his next words almost apologetic as well as regretful.

"I'm very sorry she's subpœna'd for to-morrow, Marjorie. No one could be more sorry than I am."

"I'm sorry you were the cause of it," she answered, coldly; "perhaps her coming back could not possibly have been prevented; but

your bringing her could, and would have been, if you had had ever so little thought for *her* unmixed with thought for yourself."

"It would have made this difference," said Neil, a great wrath rising in his heart as he felt how daringly Marjorie put motives on his conduct which he never had the power of contradicting; "that she would have been left to starve and die—or worse—alone in London. She, with her beauty, and helplessness, and poverty! Can you calmly think of it, Marjorie—you, a tender-hearted woman?"

"I suppose we never shall be able to put ourselves in each other's places," smiled Marjorie, looking into his face frankly and kindly for the first time for many months, "else, I suppose, Neil, I should not think quite the same of your part in this. I wish I could. I cannot bear to go on thinking of you as selfish and cruel."

"Thank you," he answered, in a voice of pain, not irony; "even without the power of putting myself in your place, I can appreciate fully all

the goodness of your acts, Marjorie dear. *You* have always been good to her."

"It was not goodness," the girl answered, almost sadly; "perhaps it was as much selfishness as yours. All I do, or could do, for her she deserves from me, for the lessons she has been unconsciously teaching me."

"But I may thank you, mayn't I?" the young man asked, turning to her earnestly as they drove down between the great old limes of Hawkedale, weird-looking in the light of the passing lamps, "because she has been, as it were, under our protection—my mother's and mine—and ours ought to have been the home to shelter her now."

"Better as it is," said the girl, curtly, her eyes aflame at his last lame speech, "better for her, better for us, better for you."

"But I must do something."

"Of course," returned Marjorie coldly, "your protection is indispensable, you always felt that. Just wait till to-morrow is over, then claim your privilege. If the brother is condemned, surely it will be a consolation to the sister

to feel that the High Sheriff is more merciful than the Judge, and offers *her*, at any rate, an entire absolution."

"Don't be sarcastic to-night, Marjorie," pleaded Sir Neil, with an earnestness which was foreign to his usually lazy tones; "I am as miserable as she is herself. You win all her gratitude, I all her contempt. I own it is natural, but still it is rather less easy to bear than you can imagine. Where—where you wish to please, it is hard to find that you always hurt."

"Neil," inquired Marjorie, abruptly, "how long is your mother going to persist in her inveterate anger against Miss Chester?"

"I don't know," he said, and as he spoke the lamplight showed a real anxiety on the face she had always known so careless; "I have told you again and again that I think *you* could convince her, if you would try."

"I won't go to her again to try," was the quick answer. "I said I would not until the trial was over, and I will not. She was unpersuadable and hard and dogmatic in her arguments, as only a woman can be. I said I

wouldn't encourage her again to say things that put me in a passion, and made her bellow—oh yes, she did bellow, Neil, don't interrupt. So I've never been but that once, and I don't intend to plead for Miss Chester again, until to-morrow is over. Surely the horrible farce cannot last longer than one day."

"You never break your word, Marjorie, so it is of no use asking you."

"No use, Neil," she interrupted, impetuously; "but oh, I do break my word; I've broken it a hundred times since" (she checked herself hurriedly)—"since I made even that one resolution. But I have not broken it in that. I will not stoop again to Lady Athelston. Miss Chester can live without your mother as well as without my sister. Let them go."

"Polite," smiled Neil. "But do you change your opinions, if you do not break your word, or do you still think——"

"I still think everything I used to think," the girl answered, hastily; "I still think I would give all I have (though that isn't much) if you and I hadn't been so idiotic as to go into the

Rectory study that day with Louisa. Oh, if I had but been miles away! It seems that everybody is to be able to tell something to help on that one story, and is to be made to do it, too! And foremost of all, Neil, I still think Eustace Jelfrey is not dead."

"Ah, Marjorie," he said, gently, "the very way you say it betrays how weak your belief really is. You have no confidence in your own opinion. No, the impossibility of such an idea must be patent to us all by now."

"Good night," she struck in, abruptly: "don't come in. I don't want to hear Louisa talk about to-morrow, and I don't want to talk about to-day. I have fancied all day that I could hear the Bleaborough bells and the trumpets—deafening farce! Good night."

She stood upon the steps, looking after him as he rode away.

"Poor Neil!" she said to herself, with a smile and a sigh together, "will anything ever teach him how to act in real, noble, self-forgetfulness? I feel so often maddened by him, yet never hopeless. The idea of Lady Athelston's old fal-

lacy that *I* do him good! I—think of it! I wonder what good I could ever do anyone, even if I loved them, and I suppose that is the motive power most wanted. If I loved Neil, should I be less miserable to-night than I am, or more so? I wonder. And if I loved——"

Even the unbreathed thought was not finished. Standing there in the hush and darkness of the night—standing there alone and unseen—the colour yet rose slowly and vividly in Marjorie's cheeks; and, knowing what thought had summoned it, she put up both her hands to hide it, sobbing as she never sobbed when any eyes could see, or ears could hear her.

And Neil went slowly on his way back to High Athelston, thinking, more than he imagined, about the girl who had dismissed him so suddenly; but for such thoughts she might have been glad and grateful in her heart.

"I, too, wish that to-morrow were over," he said to himself, as the gates of High Athelston were locked behind him, "or that they had pricked Burton for High Sheriff instead of me.

Yet I don't know why I mind," he added, almost savagely, as he cantered on. "A nice thing if the laws are to be broken, and life taken with impunity under our very eyes!"

And a few minutes afterwards he was listening, half amused and half indifferent, to the rehearsal of the pageant which was to go from High Athelston on the morrow.

"We had to-day the best show there's been in Bleaborough since last an Athelston was High Sheriff," the servant said, as the Baronet turned away; "yet he doesn't seem to care about it. I thought he wasn't going to give the orders at all for to-morrow."

"My Lady was waiting up to see Sir Neil, if he would be good enough to step into her dressing-room."

He *was* good enough to step into her dressing-room; and there he saw her, sitting fretfully beside the fire, chafing at his delay, and at Fletcher's awkwardness, and at a fancied accumulation of minor miseries.

"It was never so when Miss Chester was here," thought Neil, the long, lazy eyes taking

their intent brightness even at this momentary thought of Lina, and the thought giving him patience enough to listen in silence for ten minutes to Lady Athelston's complaints. But when these all devolved into one tearful, injured complaint of the companion in whom she had "blindly trusted," and been "basely deceived," he spoke, rousing himself from his indolence.

"Was this all you had to say, mother?"

"No; I wanted to speak about to-morrow," she whined, taking his hint; "I must have Marjorie to go with me. You cannot sit with me in the court, and so I must have Marjorie."

"You quite intend to go, then?"

"Of course I intend to go. Of course it is my duty to go," she said, querulously, "you High Sheriff, and—and the trial affecting one who has been in our service. Of course I must go, but I cannot go without Marjorie."

Marjorie's prolonged coolness and absence

rom High Athelston had worried Lady Athelston more than she would have told, and to go without Marjorie into the crowded town and court to-morrow was more than she could have attempted. Why, people might actually say that the match between her son and Miss Castillain was broken off, or something equally absurd and untrue; and no one knew what harm might come of such reports with such a girl as Marjorie, whose freaks no one could so much as pretend to understand.

"Marjorie told me she would go with you, mother," said Neil, speaking into the uplifted trumpet, "and I promised that you would drive round for her. Louisa is going with the Burtons, she hopes; she finds them kindred spirits more than ever now."

Lady Athelston breathed freely again; her mind was set at rest on its most anxious point; a great load (for her who had no loads to bear but those of her own raising) had been lifted, and she could afford to be a little harmlessly vicious now—a grand resource of

the selfish when their own personal plans have taken a favourable turn, and relieved them from any pressing anxiety.

"I shouldn't think of going without Marjorie, Neil," she said, in a melancholy tone of resignation; "but it will be very painful in any case."

Neil shivered in anticipation of the inevitable, unsubdued sobbing to which she was accustoming him. "I don't know how I shall bear to look at that deceitful girl, who let me confide in her, and pretended——"

"For Heaven's sake, mother, don't be a fool!" spoke Neil, angrily. "If you don't care about Miss Chester, what's the use of crying over her and making such a ridiculous scene? If you do care about her, what's the use of calling her names?"

He rose as he spoke, and walked away, thinking again how much more smoothly life had passed, and how much more bright the great house had felt, when Lina Chester's beautiful face and dainty figure were to be met about it.

Ah, how wan and hopeless was the beautiful face just then; how drooping and tired the dainty figure!

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

THAT afternoon, while Marjorie was at the Anchorage, Louisa Castillain, entering the drawing-room in her walking-dress, rang impatiently for tea.

"Bring it at once," she said to the antiquated butler who answered her summons—"for myself alone. It is no use waiting for Miss Marjorie, and I am in a hurry to go—into the town."

The hesitation was not caused by Louisa's unwillingness to utter the falsehood, only by her being unprepared with it.

"I think James has orders to fetch Miss Marjorie from the Anchorage at nine, ma'am," said the old man. "She walked there this

afternoon, but he was to take the phaeton to-night."

"Tell James," put in Miss Castillain, as if Miss Marjorie's orders were matters too small to interest her, "to have the phaeton ready for me in ten minutes."

"Will you return for dinner, ma'am?" inquired the butler, with the air of wishing to know what covers to lay, but with the real design of making sure that the carriage would be at liberty for Miss Marjorie, as she wished.

"I ordered dinner for two, did I not?" returned Miss Castillain, carelessly; "your master and myself. Now, do not delay with my tea."

During the few minutes that intervened between the man's dismissal and his return with the tray, Louisa paced to and fro upon the worn old hearthrug, looking a model of petulant impatience. But when, beside her cup, she caught sight of a small note addressed to herself, her whole face brightened.

"When did this come?" she inquired, as she took it up.

"Now, ma'am; as I was coming in. The footman did not wait, as there was no answer."

Something in the few lines Lady Helen Burton had written to her friend, gave that friend an extra relish for her tea. She read the note over three or four times, before she slowly folded the coroneted sheet and replaced it in its envelope; and while she did so a smile, pleased and congratulatory, though somewhat sinister, played round her small, well-shaped lips.

"*That* is all right," she muttered, as she rose and drew on her gloves, standing before the glass, and regarding complacently her high black hat and fair handsome face; "that is all right, so far."

"What brought one of the Burton Park servants here, Louisa?" inquired her father, in his sharp, abrupt voice, as he entered the room. "Has the Earl sent me a message, as he could not be in Bleaborough to-day, or is

it only some rubbish between yourself and Lady Helen?"

"Helen mentions neither her father nor mother," returned Louisa; "she only writes to me about to-morrow. The Earl and Countess are not going into Bleaborough for the trial, so Helen writes to say that I must drive with her and her brother, and they will come round here for me; I had hoped so."

"That's right," put in Mr. Castillain, rubbing his hands; "I don't wish to have out the britzka; it will want repairing soon if we use it much now. Marjorie is sure to go with the Athelstons, and I ride."

"How early you came home, papa!" remarked Louisa, lingering a little to hear what he had to say. "I fancied you would stay to dine with the Judges."

"Not very likely, when I went in on horseback and took no dress; besides, I had work I wanted to overlook here. I shall have my hands full for the next two hours."

"And was it a pleasant sort of day?" in-

quired Miss Castillain, with inquisitive enjoyment; "and did the bells ring madly? The Bleaborough bells are so beautiful, and I haven't heard them for so long! And what sort of a man is the Judge who will try the criminal cases?"

"Much the same as other Judges," returned Mr. Castillain, curtly.

"And had Sir Neil four horses to his own carriage? And did he and Mr. Jorden drive with the Judges? And how did it all look?"

"Much as it has looked as long as I can remember," was the answer, "except that Athelston is more of a fool than most High Sheriffs, and makes a greater parade."

"His full-dress liveries are gorgeous; aren't they, papa?"

"Don't get excited about it," her father answered, chillily; "other Athelstons have been fools before him; they always turn out their men like royalty. Rubbish it is! He has a fine troop of servants, though, and as

handsomely-mounted a set of tenants as one need see."

"And did many personal friends attend, papa?"

"Plenty, both in carriages and on horseback. What! you stick to this nonsense, do you?" he added, looking crossly down upon the tea equipage. "I really think, Louisa, that you might dispense with such extravagance as that; and a fire, too, on this warm day!"

"Helen says, papa," put in Louisa, dutifully turning aside his remark, while the March wind shook the casement, "that her brother declares there is not the slightest chance of the verdict to-morrow being anything but guilty."

"We know that, without her information," retorted the old gentleman, testily. "When a murder—or manslaughter if you choose—is witnessed, what doubt can there be of the verdict of twelve sensible men?"

"Of whom you are one," smiled Louisa. "Papa, I should like to be on the grand jury."

"Should you? I doubt whether the other

eleven would care about it. But there's nothing curious in the Viscount's considering the verdict settled. Bless me, what news is that? Where are you going?"

"To High Athelston, papa," replied Louisa, hastening away now, for fear of further questioning. "I shall be back in time for dinner. I never keep you waiting, do I? I leave that for Marjorie."

"Drive me up Nether Lane, to the private entrance into Athelston Park," was Louisa's order to the coachman, "and leave me there. I intend to walk home."

From the green door in the high grey wall, James turned the old pony and drove straight to the Anchorage. He might just as well stay there, he thought, until Miss Marjorie was ready. It was a pleasant place to stay at, as all the Hawkedale servants knew.

But James and the phaeton were no sooner safely out of Miss Castillain's sight than she followed them, slowly and cautiously; without having entered the park at all.

Down the lane, between the overarching

elms, she loitered until she reached the two cottages standing together; then she turned in at Mrs. Cheere's gate, and walked up the garden with a tired, languid step. Dorcas slowly opened the door upon her.

"I want to ask you to allow me to rest a few minutes," began Louisa, in her most insinuating tones. "I persisted in walking from High Athelston, and I feel quite tired already."

"'Tisn't far either," put in Mrs. Cheere, rather icily.

"Not very far, as you say," returned Louisa, forcing a conciliatory smile, "but I suppose I am out of practice for walking any distance. I declined to drive home, and now I repent my obstinacy."

"Obstinate people aren't those that generally repent most, either. Will you sit down, Miss Castillain?"

That sounded quite gracious from Dorcas, and Louisa glanced at her with a similar graciousness, but she saw no unbending of the woman's normal rigidity.

"I see you have Mr. Spendir's boy with you

still, Mrs. Cheere," she said, glancing to where Jet stood quietly washing up the tea-things while Dorcas dried them. "How kind it is of you to keep him still!"

Louisa emphasized the "still," pleasantly and admiringly; but she knew, as well as Marjorie did, the whole story of Mrs. Cheere's connection with the child, and the child's claim upon her.

"Yes, at present," returned Dorcas, shortly.

"Poor Lady Athelston is very much distressed about this trial to-morrow," began Miss Castillain, conjecturing that her listener's attention would immediately be won by mention of that lady's name.

But Dorcas stolidly awaited further imformation, and at present vouchsafed no remark.

"It is a most distressing thing," continued Louisa, "for one in her position to have been subjected to such an imposture, and to have to be now associated by name with such a person as Miss Chester must be."

"Very distressing," assented Dorcas, quite promptly now.

"And connected—through her—" continued

Miss Castillain, greatly encouraged, "with a criminal."

"Mr. Spendir?" inquired Dorcas, with liveliness. "Yes, but my lady, nor none of us, won't be troubled long with *him*."

Keen and searching was Miss Castillain's glance into the woman's face, then her lips rippled into a satisfied smile.

"Even your evidence would ensure that, would it not, Mrs. Cheere?" she asked, plausibly. "But I, too, think it a privilege to be instrumental in bringing such a criminal to justice, and freeing nervous people from being imposed upon or terrified."

"It's our duty to tell the truth," remarked Dorcas, stonily; "of course we like to do it, and to punish any criminal we've been unfortunate enough to be living near for a time."

"I fancy that the words you and Mr. Jelfrey overheard, would be quite as effectual in proving him guilty as my witnessing the crime itself," Louisa said, placidly; "at any rate, Mrs. Cheere, I look upon you as the one who will most nearly share with me the task of exposing guilt. I

am so glad to know that you look upon this task in the same light as that in which I myself see it. I know you do, Mrs. Cheere?"

The words were put as a question, graciously and rather flatteringly, and Dorcas answered them, though with a curt acidity.

"I'm glad enough to tell the truth. I'm not going to say anything but the truth. No fear, Miss Castillain; it isn't my custom. Didn't I direct the police to him myself, and tell them all I had heard him say—everything? So, even if I'd a wish to eat my words, I couldn't after that; at least, it wouldn't be any use trying. I've not lived near that man for six months for nothing, and I'll—I'll tell the truth of him, whether it brings him to the gallows or not. I shall be on my oath, as many of us will, and it isn't very likely I'd perjure myself for such as he."

"Indeed no one could ever dream of your doing that," said Louisa, eagerly; "no one would ever dream it of you, any more than of me, Mrs. Cheere. But I must really go, pleas-

ant as it is to rest here. I cannot indulge myself any longer."

Louisa rose, making her adieux—as Marjorie would have said, "with painful gush."

"The poor little boy, too," she remarked, with gentle commiseration; "his evidence would be almost sufficient without ours, would it not? And the other child's too; I'm very sorry for them both."

"They're young to come forward in a court of justice," remarked Dorcas, stiffly; "still it can't harm them. Are you rested, Miss Castillain?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," smiled Louisa, "very much rested; and I may meet the carriage from home, perhaps. Good evening, Mrs. Cheere."

Relieved of an anxiety which had been worrying her more than she would have cared to acknowledge, Louisa tripped along the lane, while Dorcas turned silently to resume her washing.

Jet tried to feel his way to a little conversation, less to relieve the monotony of his occu-

pation than to hide from Mrs. Cheere the two great globular tears which had risen to his eyes as he listened to Miss Castillain.

"Didn't she look ill when she first came in?" he asked, as he deftly put the plates into a heap.

"She looked," said Dorcas, conclusively, working a little faster than usual, and, if possible, more grimly, "as if she'd been boiled and put away to eat cold; that's how she looked when she first came in. Now put those things up, child, and don't chatter any more."

So the pair went on in silence with their small duties, while Louisa walked gaily and hastily on to Hawkedale, and was in good time to take her place at the head of her father's table. It was not either a sumptuous or cheerful table, but Louisa was not aware of any deficiency, and Mr. Castillain apparently enjoyed his haricot as much as he could possibly have enjoyed the varied repast which he might have shared, in Bleaborough, with the judges and his county neighbours.

The father and daughter were still sitting

over their wine—it was the very mildest sherry, but Louisa would not on any consideration have foregone her languid enjoyment of it—when Marjorie came home, her face unusually pale.

"Did Athelston reach the Anchorage before you left?" inquired her father.

"No."

"He told me he should leave the town as early as he could, and that he wanted to see Mrs. Esdaile. Then you haven't seen him?"

This was a different question.

"Yes, I've seen him, papa."

"And what did he say?"

"A variety of interesting things," returned the girl, flushing nervously.

"I've no doubt," said the old gentleman, with a laugh which testified to his real enjoyment of the idea, but which made Marjorie wince; "I've no doubt of it. I don't wish to probe into your affectionate secrets; I only mean, what did he say about the dinner?"

"I think he had forgotten it," replied Marjorie, her lips twitching a little at the corners.

"What did he say about to-morrow?" put in Louisa. "Will it be a trying day to him, as well as to us all? Horrible it is," she sighed, "to be mixed up in such an affair—a most degrading thing for us Castillains."

"Otherwise immaculate."—It was Marjorie who capped the speech so promptly.—"We come of a splendid old stock, don't we, Louie? But we are rather a sort of potato crop, the best part of us is under ground. I believe there were some Castillains worth picking up in the last century."

"Don't hesitate about insulting *me*, Marjorie," spoke her sister, resignedly; "but I think you might stop and consider before you insult your own father. It will be well, I'm sure, when this trial is over, for your temper has been getting more and more unbearable every month since that man was taken up. After to-morrow, perhaps, we shall have a little peace. You cannot excite yourself about a condemned criminal."

"If——"

The word came involuntarily from Marjorie's

lips; then she paused in sudden consciousness of how little her sister would understand the speech she had begun.

"There's no 'if' in the case," laughed Louisa, "everyone says it. You know that Neil says the same, only you will not acknowledge it."

"What's the use of trial by jury, if every ignoramus knows the verdict beforehand?" asked the younger sister, angrily. "Besides, I may say 'if,' if I like, a dozen, and a hundred times. I like 'if.' I say, with Touchstone, 'Much virtue in If!'"

"Papa says," persisted Louisa, with a smile, "that by this time to-morrow there won't be a dissentient voice about the man's guilt."

"How can there be," inquired Mr. Castillain, conclusively, "when it is the truth; and plenty of clever men are here to disclose, and sift, and pronounce that truth?"

"But even clever men, papa, ever so clever," said Marjorie, gently, "may construe a thing in utterly different ways, either by chance or will."

"There's no fear of things being construed unfairly, at any rate," interposed the elder sister, as she rose from her chair. "The counsel—not to speak of the judge and jury—will see this whole thing in a moment. Rest satisfied with that, Marjorie, my dear."

"Don't put me down as if I were a baby," exclaimed the girl, rising too, her eyes flashing passionately. "I have different ideas of justice from you. I'm thankful to say so. Be quiet."

Louisa smiled compassionately. "I hope your behaviour will be a little improved, when this man's last degradation is over," she said, as she left the room.

"It won't be any degradation," cried the younger girl, with a stamp of her foot, and a hot colour flaming in her cheeks. "That trial to-morrow won't be a bit of degradation. Shakespeare knew better than you do, and he says it's the heretic that *makes* the fire, not that burns in it. Don't talk any more to me."

"You are a little goose, Marjorie," put in her

father, pettishly. "Run away to your tea, and leave these matters to the lawyers."

"I could almost say, papa," the girl said, hesitating still with him, in her unwillingness to join her sister, and looking into his face with eyes half defiant and half wistful; "I could quite say with Cade—wasn't it?—'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.'"

Mr. Castillain laughed his short, grating laugh, but all he said was, "That shows how unsteady all your confidence is, child; and I advise you not to begin making these random speeches to Athelston."

On her way to the drawing-room, Marjorie stopped before the great carved oak clock in the hall. A long while she stood, and the steps that passed (as the old butler went to and fro) never roused her.

"Twelve hours more before day begins," she whispered to herself, at last, as she turned away, "and then the vast, immense day itself; and then—— But I think almost anything on earth is easier to bear than doubt."

* * * * * * *

That last day of suspense was dying in its midnight hush.

At Hawkedale, Louisa Castillain was sleeping the untroubled sleep of the innocent; while Marjorie (tossing wakefully upon her pillows) still tried to think that thought she had so often whispered to herself, that anything was easier to bear than doubt—forgetting how doubt is the shadow of hope itself.

At High Athelston, Lady Athelston had fallen asleep placidly, in the consciousness that she should have Marjorie to lean upon on the morrow, Marjorie who (she tried to believe) had always been a better prop for her than the girl on whom she had relied for a time so blindly. While Neil, sitting moodily before his fire, chafed impatiently at one thought only, the sorest thought of all to his proud, high-bred nature. Could he bear to see the beautiful, delicate, timid girl he loved, exposed upon the morrow to the broad gaze, and free remarks, and coarse suspicions of a crowded court, with no one near her who had the right to support, or help, or encourage her? Could he bear to

see the pain upon her face, and the fear? Could he bear it, if her evidence helped to bring in the damning verdict which so surely must be brought? Could he bear it, knowing that he —the reigning Baronet of High Athelston—had chosen this girl to love, and must even choose to love her still, through all this degradation?

At the cottage in Nether Lane, Jet lay crying quietly upon his small, wet pillow; trying hard to suppress his sobs, for fear of their being heard and objected to in the next room! In the next room!—where Dorcas, with her hard hands tight upon her face, knelt in the darkness.

At the Anchorage, Colonel Stuart sat writing fast, and thoroughly engrossed. Little Jack had cried himself to sleep in his soft white bed; and from one window, Lina Chester looked out into the thick darkness of the March night, seeing —as she always fancied she saw in light and darkness, by day or night, as it had been five years before—one prison cell; and her hands ached in the anguish of their clasp, as

she pictured the change which these slow months had wrought in the dauntless heart and the brave face she loved so dearly.

And so around them all deepened the silence and the darkness of that night upon which was to dawn the day of Gerard's trial.

CHAPTER VII.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

THE Bleaborough Assize Court had not been so crowded since an assizes nearly twenty years before, when a murderer (now standing in pale and ferocious effigy at Madame Tussaud's) was tried for a crime which made all England ring with execration upon his name. By ten o'clock there was left no standing space throughout the whole building, save where it had been specially reserved.

There were two or three reasons why this trial should excite so much attention; chief among them the fact of the prisoner being no common man ("an artist and a gentle-

man," it was said), and of so many distinguished people being mixed up in the affair. Bleaborough was not often favoured with the trial of a *gentleman*, either for wilful murder or manslaughter, where the witnesses nearly all belonged to the county families, and where even the High Sheriff was himself served with a subpœna; so Bleaborough might well be excused for exciting itself unusually, and for crushing itself indefatigably in its untiring efforts to obtain seats in the Criminal Court.

Down from the gaol, through the swaying crowd, came the close van, with its barred window and its guard of police; and suggestive jests were hurled jauntily at its invisible occupants, as it turned under the archway at the back of the Assize Court.

And presently, round to the front entrance, drove the Sheriff's splendid carriage, and the burly, scarlet-robed figure of the Judge issued therefrom into the midst of obsequious servants and officials. He and the Sheriff entered the Court together, and to both of

them the room seemed already a mass of restless faces.

Sir Neil's eyes ranged along the crowded gallery and about the building, intent and anxious. Where was she? He saw her at last, sitting beside Mrs. Esdaile, near the witnesses, but it was many minutes before he could bear to look into her face after he had discovered her. Cool and self-satisfied as he seemed in his dignity, his heart thumped heavily when he saw her, sitting bowed and pale, her eyes fixed upon her brother's face, so sadly hopeless and piteous in their gaze, and filled with such great yearning and great love.

Neil gazed from her to Mrs. Esdaile, almost appealingly, and the watchful, careful tenderness of that lady's face and manner gave him a feeling as nearly approaching to gratitude as were any of the feelings to which he was accustomed. Then he gave a glance into the face of the man who stood alone in the railed-off space nearly in the centre of the court. One glance only, and his lips curled;

though something that felt like pity began even then to stir his heart.

He an Athelston! Standing there, a prisoner at the bar, to answer for the deadliest crime a man can commit; he to call himself an Athelston! How scornfully this crowd would jeer, if they could know whose name this murderer claimed!

Neil started, finding that he was losing the address for the prosecution. Yes, he had entirely lost the opening. The prisoner had been banned as a forger, and as a convict returned with a ticket-of-leave nearly two years before. Everything suspicious in his previous life had been related in its worst aspect, before the Sheriff's attention was won entirely to the case. Then he listened, moodily and contemptuously, while the prisoner's guilt was made evident; terribly evident to the dullest comprehension in the court, as guilt can be made by a barrister only; and all the time, he was watching intently the listening faces.

Seated together in the best position in the

court were Lady Athelston and Marjorie. Marjorie's head was not bowed like Lina's, nor were her eyes fixed yearningly upon the prisoner; yet there was something in the girls' faces which made them strangely alike to Neil, though the touch of sympathy which would have explained the likeness to him, he could not understand.

A very tiresome companion was Lady Athelston to the girl beside her; she perpetually wanted to be enlightened on some particular point (rendered impossible by her deafness), got terribly excited when Louisa Castillain appeared in the witness-box, and gave promise at last of an irrepressible attack of hysterics. Marjorie was struck with a new idea to quiet her. She wrote a few words rapidly on her tablets and passed them on. They were:

"Neil is looking angrily across at us. He means that we are not to talk or make a sensation; we will discuss it all quietly at home afterwards."

Lady Athelston nodded assent to this, and sat quite still, silenced by the wholesome awe

of her son's displeasure, looking admiringly over to where he sat with folded arms, and contemptuous lips as he listened to Miss Castillain's evidence, so coldly, clearly, and circumstantially given. Marjorie listened too, her eyes dark with passion, and the brows drawn down close above them.

Colonel Stuart sat with his head leaning on his hand, and never once looked up. Jack Esdaile stood beside his uncle, listening eagerly, while his breathing grew quick and irregular. Louisa had nearly reached the end of her long, unhurried narrative; had described vividly the murder she had witnessed in the valley, when the prisoner had deliberately flung deceased into the mine and then fled; and was just volunteering the information that the woman who had for many months lived next door to the prisoner, had, some time before, overheard him threaten to kill deceased; when there was a slight commotion in the court—only a slight one, half contemptuous, half pitiful.

"Nothing, my lord, except that the prisoner's boy has fallen forward in a swoon."

"The crush and heat, of course. Take him out into the air," some one said; but the woman who sat beside him raised him coolly, and settled his head against her shoulder.

"He's as well here as he'll be outside," she said, taking no further notice. "It had nothing to do with the crush and heat."

Upon the little resting figure and ashy white face, the prisoner's eyes were fixed with anxious tenderness. Marjorie, burning, and even trembling, with shame and anger as she listened to her sister's narration, saw this, and hid her own face from the crowd. Then little Jack Esdaile was taken to the witness-box, and he told the facts almost exactly as Miss Castillain had told them; only that somehow the words seemed all different as they passed his twitching, sorrowful lips.

"I didn't like Mr. Jelfrey, although he was my tutor," spoke the boy, in an unexpected and unorthodox burst of confidence; "and I did like Mr. Spendir very, very much. He was always kind and good to us boys. Mr. Jelfrey was al-

ways hard and disagreeable to us, unless grown-up people were by."

Jack was here given to understand that his opinons on the subject had not been requested; and, blushing hotly in his confusion, he rejoined Colonel Stuart.

"Have I done very badly, Uncle Alick?" he whispered, anxiously.

"You have done all you could, I suppose, Jack," was the answer. "I have but little hope, though."

"Marjorie, Marjorie, who is this—who is this next witness?"

Lady Athelston was leaning forward on her seat, in an attitude of attention which the knowledge of her deafness made it rather piteous to see. Marjorie wrote down Jet's name, not trusting herself even to raise her eyes, which were bright and excited now behind their gathering tears.

A slight, sympathetic motion again in the crowded court, as the child was taken to the witness-box; so ill he looked, so cowed and really terrified. He repeated the oath slowly,

then kissed the book with stiff, white lips.

Yes, he had been in the valley in the afternoon of the twelfth of November. He supposed it was the twelfth he meant. He was with Miss Castillain and Master Esdaile; Miss Castillain had met them just before, and turned with them to go home together. He had seen—by the pool—

The words, each an agonised whisper, here broke off entirely, and the rest was wrung from him by questioning.

Yes, he had seen the prisoner fling the deceased into the pool. "I only thought it was a pool," volunteered the child, with a flash of sudden, nervous courage, "and dad only thought it was a pool. We didn't know about a mine." Yes, he saw Miss Chester run towards prisoner —the questions helped him on again now that the short-lived courage had died in its sudden flash—she looked terrified. She seemed as if she was going to stop him, but she was too late. No; prisoner had not seen any of them, he was quite sure; he had not even seen Miss

Chester, who had run towards him. She fell down when deceased was thrown into the water, and Miss Castillain had ridden away very fast, and then they two had followed, and ridden straight to the Anchorage.

After this, there was a strict cross-examination for the child to undergo; and then, before he left his place, the prisoner was asked if he wished to question this witness. No, he had no need to do so, he answered, gazing for a long minute into the face of the frightened child, with just that old tenderness in his eyes which made them so warmly beautiful.

Mr. Jorden was examined next, and then his daughter; and their evidence only confirmed entirely, as far as it went, the deposition of Louisa Castillain. And so indeed did Sir Neil Athelston's when he took Miss Jorden's place; only that he added (with an easy intent glance into Fitz Spendir's face) that he had reason to know that deceased ("Ah," thought Marjorie, "if they would only find other names now!") hated the prisoner, and wished him out of the country. Evidently Sir Neil Athelston felt that his opinion had its weight; but no other words

did he vouchsafe, either in favour of the criminal, or in disparagement of the man who was spoken of as dead.

"I have known the prisoner intimately for a year,"—it was Colonel Stuart who was speaking now, and after his simple testimony as to the correctness of the preceding statements, his grave, clear tones carried a strange force with them, simple and incisive—"and I have learned to respect him thoroughly. During all that time, he has worked hard, executing orders for myself and a few of my friends round Churchhill, and most of the money which he earned he has been putting by towards paying off what he considered a debt to my sister's husband; that sum for which the learned prosecutor says Mr. Esdaile's name was forged five years ago, the sum for which deceased, I have now reason to believe, drew a cheque which, by a plausible lie, he induced the prisoner to cash. I have known Gerard Dymocke, through my late wife's memory, for six years; and besides this, by my own personal knowledge I have proved him to be an honourable man, in

the very highest and deepest sense of the word. He spent last Summer in hard, incessant work, doing no act, even saying no word, which could injure the man who had destroyed his prospects and his good name. When the two men met, on the day that the last, if not the greatest, insult had been offered from the prosperous man to the struggling and suffering one—met alone in the solitude—was it wonderful that they should fight, as men do fight after an injury, gaining generally credit rather than blame? And as they chanced to meet on the brink of that water, of the treachery of which prisoner knew nothing, was it natural that he should go out of his way to avoid being near it? Was the circumstance of his going straight home from the lake a sign that he felt he had deliberately committed a deed for which he could be lawfully punished with death?"

This Colonel Stuart asked with a simple, straight-forward earnestness which had its full weight; yet, after all, was but little to weigh against the testimony of those who had seen the deed perpetrated.

"Marjorie, Marjorie, how absent you seem!" fretted Lady Athelston, in a whisper. "Is Colonel Stuart's evidence helping to hang that poor creature?"

"Hush!" cried the girl, in a sharp, pained whisper, of which her companion was happily unconscious.

"Oh, Marjorie, I'm afraid you have to go now," whined Lady Athelston. "Make haste, my dear, back to me. Don't stay to say much. I shall be so nervous."

Marjorie, as she rose, gave a smile down into the weak, pleading face; but it was not like Marjorie's brilliant smile, it was cold and sad and tired.

And now Marjorie stood in the witness-box, with hundreds of eyes upon her, and hundreds of ears waiting for her version of this story, waiting for her to endorse or confute her sister's statement.

But Marjorie had evidently as little intention of doing the one as she had power of doing the other.

"I happened to call at Churchill Rectory on

the afternoon of the twelfth of November," she said, after having quietly taken her oath, "and was there when my sister rode from the valley to obtain help for Mr. Jelfrey. She told us then—Mr. Jorden and his daughter, Colonel Stuart, Sir Neil Athelston, and myself —in substance, exactly what she has told in court to-day."

"I had known Mr. Eustace Jelfrey for two years before that date," Marjorie said, when questioned of all she knew about prisoner's connection with deceased, "and I disliked and mistrusted him through all that time. He had missed no opportunity of insulting, annoying, and threatening Mr. Spendir ever since Mr. Spendir first settled in Highshire; and, to my knowledge, Mr. Jelfrey practised deceit upon us all; for never, until his disappearance, was it known among us that he was a married man when he came to the Anchorage. I do not believe Mr. Jelfrey is dead. He was, as he has often told us, an expert and able swimmer—he used to boast of it—and I know him well enough to be sure that, if by seeming dead

he could injure Mr. Spendir, the seeming would come very easily to him."

This Marjorie said, speaking in sharp, clear sentences, and ignoring the two words she hated. She never looked at the audience, but at the bench, with a quiet, steadfast truthfulness in her clear eyes.

Neil gazed at her in astonishment; he had known intuitively, though she had never spoken to him confidentially on the subject, that her evidence would not go to corroborate Louisa's; but he had never guessed with what real earnestness she would plead for the prisoner, an earnestness more evident in her tone and her face than in the words she uttered.

Marjorie left her place without once venturing to glance at the solitary figure in that railed-off space among the crowd; so she had never seen how his worn face brightened, as he listened hungrily to her rich young voice.

"Lina Chester."

Slowly the girl made her way to the place Marjorie had vacated. In the crush, many

moved instinctively to let her pass, pitying the restless pallor of the beautiful face, while others pressed forward to take a full look at it.

"My name is Magdalen Dymocke, and I am sister to the prisoner. You have related the reason of his dropping his real name, and in doing so, have given it back to him; so I am glad to take mine, too."

Neil, sitting quite still in his place, felt as if the low, shy voice pierced him with pain in every word it uttered.

"We knew Eustace Jelfrey nearly six years ago. He had offered to initiate my brother into the ways of London, as my brother, who was several years younger, had lived through all his youth in a distant part of Cornwall. Into *what* he had power to initiate him, I only knew afterwards. What sin he committed and was clever enough to lay upon my brother, has been spoken of to-day. So skilfully it was done, that the trial resulted in Mr. Jelfrey's escape from suspicion, and in my brother's transportation for eight years. It has

been told against him to-day; and again has made him appear guilty. Eustace Jelfrey escaped then. It was easy to him, for he had skill, and craft, and money; my brother had neither, and from that day his life was a ruined and a broken life."

A quick exclamation in the court, and a bottle of smelling-salts passed from hand to hand towards Lina.

"Thank you," she said, turning her eyes gratefully for a moment towards Lady Athelston and Marjorie, "but I am not faint."

Not faint! and the white, nervous fingers holding so tightly for support, and the beautiful, wide eyes so feverish. Neil's heart ached with a heavy pain, his strong, handsome face grew harassed and fretful.

"I am not faint." As she had spoken, her eyes turned again to the prisoner, and then the whole curious crowd saw the look which passed between the brother and sister—a look of deathless love, and sympathy, and trust—and once more that sound

of pity, like a sob, stirred the multitude.

"On the twelfth of last November I went to my brother's house in the morning, and arranged to call on him the same day at dusk. Mr. Eustace Jelfrey had had the power placed in his hands, of making known to Lady Athelston (without himself telling her) the secret of our lives, and he had proposed to me certain conditions which, if complied with, should prevent his availing himself of this power. So I went to consult my brother. He was working hard and indefatigably, trying to accumulate the sum for which that forged cheque had been drawn on Mr. Esdaile, and I was saving to help him. These efforts would be unavailing if we left Highshire, as I knew; and the—and the—those who had been kind and compassionate to us would have cause indeed to despise our memory always. Yet did I not know that now we could not help their despising us, whatever we did? If the truth were told, they would feel what cause they had to scorn us; if we

went without its being told, they would know we had deceived them ungratefully."

The High Sheriff, sitting motionless, with folded arms, had his eyes half closed now in their old sleepy fashion, so no one saw their dimness.

"When I went in the afternoon to consult my brother, I found that he had gone along the valley to meet the boys on their return from the Low Farm. I followed him, partly because I was really anxious for his answer to be given that evening, and partly because——"

"For what other reason?" The question came promptly from the Bench.

"Partly," Lina said, in her truthful, brave simplicity, "because I knew Mr. Jelfrey was going on the same way for the same purpose, and I feared his meeting with my brother. So much of wrong he had done us, and so prosperous was he in his own sins, that I could not help dreading that they should meet at night, in the solitude of the hills, just when this new, craven demand of Mr. Jelfrey's was weighing and pressing on my brother's mind, and he

knew that all his hopes of earning work and a home, were shattered. I had not quite reached the pool above the valley, when I saw Miss Castillain and the two boys coming on horseback; and we had not quite met when I saw——"

At last the low, anxious voice broke down, while a great silence held the Court. But it was only a few moments before she went on, still brave and truthful.

"When I saw my brother and Mr. Jelfrey fighting near the water—close to the water; so near that one of them could hardly help being thrown into the pool, if either were thrown down at all. I remembered, in a sudden terror, that my brother had never heard of the old shaft under the water, and so I hurried on, trying to reach him, and tell him what I knew would stay his hand there on the water's edge."

"Stay. You had good cause then to believe that Mr. Jelfrey would be the one to suffer?"

"I did fancy so. I hardly know exactly

why," she answered, simply, "but I *did* fancy so. I remembered how many injuries my brother had received, and how the last and greatest had only just before been told him, and must be hurting him keenly then; and I think I fancied that his hand would be the stronger, because the *right* was on his side."

"*Expecting* what the end would be, you tried to reach the two men as they fought?"

"I tried, because I feared what the end might be; because I knew my brother had not heard of the exhausted mine. But I was too late."

"What did you see—exactly."

"I saw Mr. Jelfrey's hand on my brother's collar, and one moment afterwards my brother had thrown him from him, and he had fallen into the water. I cannot say what my brother did then, or where Miss Castillain went, for I do not know. I suppose I fainted."

"And when you were conscious again?" The voice of the questioner was a little softened and compassionate.

"When I awoke I found the valley deserted.

When it all came back to me, I knew Miss Castillain had gone to tell it, and my first impulse was to fly. I never saw my brother, even for a moment, after that; until I saw him—in gaol."

"You have heard the prisoner say that he should think it no sin to kill deceased?"

"Ah! when would these cruel questions cease?" thought Marjorie, her fingers hurt in their tight clasp, as she gazed at Lina's white and quivering lips.

"Yes; he said it to me. The witness who overheard it will tell of that. Mr. Jelfrey had blighted our lives for ever; was it any wonder that my brother should hate him? But this hatred only caused him to avoid Mr. Jelfrey. He has never, to anyone but myself, uttered a word to his disparagement. Was he not labouring always to earn what should repay a debt of Eustace Jelfrey's? His nature was, above all things, forbearing. Pre-eminently strong and brave to bear, it always has been; and I have never known him, all his life, willingly hurt even a dog."

Did the prisoner wish to question this witness?

"No, he had no question to ask," the prisoner said, without lifting his eyes.

Only once had he raised them to Lina during her examination. The agony of her face, in which the wonderful dark eyes seemed to burn with love and misery, was more than he dared trust himself to meet again. But while he almost unconsciously watched the effect of her words—almost unconsciously, because his eyes were tired—all feeling, acute and intensified, rushed back to him when he suddenly became aware of how intently Neil Athelston listened. He, the High Sheriff sitting there in his honour and ease and dignity, watching the misery of the girl who had lived under his roof; and evidently foreseeing the fate of the prisoner who had no name, and no real place in the world, even if he were allowed to be harmless enough to stay in it. A hot light shone in Gerard's eyes at the thought—a passion which literally flamed beneath their heavy, weary lids.

So far there was nothing in the evidence sufficient to cast down Louisa Castillain's spirits; yet the suppressed sigh of pity in the court (suppressed until it was not more than a breath), did give her a creeping, indefinable fear of defeat.

"This slight movement in those people's favour will be of short duration," whispered Lady Helen Burton, encouragingly; "all the evidence goes to prove him guilty. The people now are in just the state to be decided entirely by the last witness, and we need not doubt what the verdict will be when we see who is the last witness. There she is; what a stony-looking creature!"

"Look at Sir Neil; just look how he is watching her. Isn't it absurd?" put in Louisa, sharply.

"Who?" inquired Lady Helen, levelling her lorgnette towards Colonel Stuart's group. "You mean Miss Chester, I suppose—at least Miss Something else, for I am sure I cannot find out what her real name is, or if she has one. He must pity the poor little wretch to-day, I should think. It is the last time she will ever

find herself under the same roof with Sir Neil Athelston."

"Dorcas Cheere."

The woman, lean and tall and upright, stood there in the witness-box just as she would have stood either in the dock or on the bench; just as she used to stand at her cottage door, to hurl fierce and wrathful darts from her quick tongue, at Fitz. No other attitude came quite naturally to Dorcas yet, and she would adopt no unnatural one for this occasion. Her face was lined and hard, and her lips tight and stern. Even Marjorie, in her keen scrutiny, could detect nothing in her manner beyond its old rigidity. As she took the oath, with cold, scrupulous, and even superstitious correctness, the girl's heart sank with a sickening despair.

"My name is Dorcas Cheere, and I live in the cottage adjoining that one occupied, through the last Summer, by the prisoner at the bar."

Lower and lower sank Marjorie's heart. Lina's two hands went up to cover her aching

eyes. Louisa Castillain leaned a little more forward in her seat, and listened eagerly with parted lips.

"I was very angry when Colonel Stuart obtained for him the cottage next to mine, and I told everyone so. I did not know anything about him, but I knew that I had had no choice in the matter, and I resented it. He had no one living with him but a little boy who called him father. They two muddled on as they could; at least I chose to think their life was a muddle, though I never went to see. I heard them making absurd noises sometimes—singing and laughing, and playing, just as if they were two schoolboys out for a holiday—and this naturally aggravated me more. They were very poor, too, and I did not care (as I used to say, whenever I had an opportunity of saying it), for the cottage next mine to be let to a pauper. I knew he worked hard and earned money, yet he had no furniture to speak of, and no comforts in his house, and the mystery of *that* provoked me too. The boy never went to school, nor played with other boys, but was always with his

father, as he called him, and he used to read to him for hours and hours at a time. One day Mr. Jelfrey came to my cottage on an excuse of sheltering, though I remember now that he went away in rain as heavy as he came in; and he began to talk of my neighbour, and to say quietly evil things of him; and then he found out from me—though I've been puzzling since to find out how he did it, for I'm no talker and babbler—that the wall in my parlour closet was uncommonly thin, and that I could often hear what the man and boy were saying in the next room. Over and over again he came, after that, pretending he wanted to read a valuable book I had of history—several months at two shillings a month, and unfinished—really though to listen to what was going on next door, and to put me up to listening too. One night he came more quietly than usual, and made more fuss about being polite to me. Miss Chester had gone to the other cottage. I was vicious enough against them, I remember, for I didn't know they were any relation to each other; and he seemed rather to admire me for my anger. I remember

he talked a good deal about his life not being safe; in fact, he hinted that no life was safe near Mr. Spendir. I took it all in, and between his speeches we listened to what they might be saying next door. Suddenly he heard what I fancied he must so long have been after. I heard it too; it was just what I told afterwards to Mrs. Esdaile and to the police. One gentleman has repeated the words to-day exact. I recognised their being exact, yet they sounded more revengeful, as he said them, than I thought for.

"That is all, gentlemen, except that I have a bit of a story of my own to tell, if his lordship allows me. I hope he will, for it is as necessary to this trial as repeating those words I overheard. Thank you," she said, as, after a slight discussion, she was told by the clerk to speak up.

"More than thirty years ago,"—her voice was slow and calm only by a great effort, while her stern face flushed and paled like a girl's in her excitement—"more than thirty years ago my little girl (my only one) was stolen from me, and I never saw her face again, or heard a

word of her welfare or her death. I never knew whether I might watch, as well as wait, for her home-coming, or whether I had any right to dream of a little girl in Heaven. For thirty years this suspense made my life cold and hard and solitary, this and my own much-encouraged ill-temper. Now I know her story, and a little of it I must repeat to-day. When she was grown up (and pretty, as I always knew she would be), this man, whom you call the deceased, saw her, admired her, and persuaded her to marry him. He took her from the good friends who had adopted her and loved her, and he never let them look upon her face again. He gave her a dull, mean home in some out-of-the-way part of London, going to her only occasionally, living a free, gay life himself, while she was penned in this comfortless place, alone until after the birth of her son—this boy, gentlemen, who has been called the prisoner's child. At last he left her entirely. She worked for her own livelihood and her baby's, delicate, poor, and friendless. The boy was three or

four years old when the prisoner—having heard her story from those friends who had been so good to her—sought her out, and helped and cheered her. He would have sent his sister to her, but that he knew it was no place for her to go alone with her uncommon beauty; so he went on being kind to my little girl, until he was accused of that crime which has been so much talked of to-day—the crime my little girl's cruel husband had committed. I don't know anything about how it could have happened that he should have been transported for this, but he was, and he went away for eight years. In a little more than four, he came back, because leave had been given him for good conduct. One of his first acts when he reached London was to find out Eustace Jelfrey's neglected wife, to whom he had been good before. He found her in the same comfortless home, poorer, more friendless, more delicate, but not minding so much, because she was fast dying now."

An odd, quick catching of her breath here

was all that Dorcas allowed the crowd to hear, or see, of her strongly-curbed emotion.

"He—the man you make me call the prisoner—went to her again and again, and when she died, he paid (though Heaven knows he must have been poor enough, and I don't dare to think what hard work he did for that money) for a grave for her, and for careful hands to carry her to it—as people don't carry a pauper. And after that, he took the motherless, homeless, and worse than fatherless boy to a home which he made for him, and to a love and care which never after that failed him. From that day to the night I heard the greater part of this story—after seeing the prisoner taken in handcuffs from his own cottage, with my taunting words ringing in his ears—his home was the boy's home; all he had was shared with the child (shared equally, as two boys might have shared with each other), and in his great love and kindliness he never let the boy know he was not his own son, for fear he should feel the obligation, and fancy that all he did for him was not naturally done.

"Now, gentlemen, you understand that all this while the boy's father was living. Never one penny has he allowed for his son's maintenance; all has been paid out of the hard earnings of the prisoner, who, as we heard to-day, has been saving to pay a debt really owing by this very man. If I could but have that time back again, when I tried to make his life more miserable than it was; when I did all I could to madden him, and *should* have maddened him, only he was always too patient, and too forbearing to be maddened by me—then I should be content. This is what I know of the two men, my lord and gentlemen, and I suppose that when they met they fought. It would have been hard to help it, I should think, remembering all this; and Mr. Jelfrey, after all, is as likely to be alive as dead. It was plain to see he was cunning enough for anything. But if they *did* fight, and the man who had the best heart had the strongest hand too, and punished the coward at last, after years and years of injury, would that act be murder?

Even if it would be called manslaughter, the law isn't so honest and just as we're always being told it is."

No voice had silenced, or even interrupted, Dorcas. Even the utterly unprofessional part of her evidence fell amid total silence. The effect of her words was keen and decisive. So earnestly, and with such heart-felt regret had she spoken (losing all thought of what the effect of her words on others was likely to be) that it startled even herself when, out of the silence, there rose the low, sad sound of women's sobs.

In a little haste, the counsel for the prosecution began his cross-examination. When this was over, Dorcas went back to her place beside her little grandson, and the eyes of the prisoner followed her with an untold gladness in them. His boy—his delicate, solitary child—would not be hardly treated now, he knew; would not lay down his head in the darkness, and wish that he might never be called to raise it again. Oh, this was good to know, after

those bitter fears for the child, which he had fought with through three long months in prison.

The case was almost closed. The learned doctor, specially retained for the defence, addressed the jury, saying the case he had to submit to them was this:

There really was no evidence to support the charge of manslaughter. The character of the prisoner was unexceptionable, and that of the deceased (if he must call him deceased, when there was no actual proof of his death) very much the reverse. He would leave it with them to decide whether there was a case for a verdict of guilty. Much more than this, the doctor said, but in the same strain; and then the judge briefly summed up the evidence, and the jury retired.

One silent, almost breathless, quarter of an hour in court—hope and fear holding their sway in hundreds of hearts, and hanging their ensigns on hundreds of faces—and then the door was opened, and the jurymen returned, one

standing forward and looking at the judge. An utter silence, for the hearing of the verdict in every corner of the court.

"Not guilty."

CHAPTER VIII.

DISPERSED.

TO a ringing cheer which throbbed to the roof of the crowded building, this much-talked-of trial ended, and Gerard Dymocke came out into the open air, before the twilight of the March evening had gathered. It was months since he had breathed the wide, pure breath of heaven, unfettered and unconfined, and the sensation made him totter for a moment. Then he drew his hand hastily across his forehead, partly in weariness and bewilderment, partly in his great relief.

Colonel Stuart had given him the address of an inn where he was to join him, and Gerard

knew that it would be near, and that it was chosen that he might avoid the crowd.

Would Magdalen come back to him now? Would she be well enough and strong enough now to go with him; travelling as poor people travel?

"The hotel is quite full this evening; there really is no private room vacant."

Gerard handed to the landlord, the card which the Colonel had given him. Then came the words,

"Oh, yes. The gentleman meant the room reserved by Colonel Stuart. It was all right. It had been kept all day for him."

He would stay there a few minutes for Colonel Stuart, Gerard said, tiredly, as he went in. No thought but the thought that Lina might come, could have induced him to wait at all.

The carriages were rolling as rapidly now from the front of the Assize Court, as they had rolled thither in the excitement of the morning. But the feelings of most of the occupants were strangely changed.

"Louie, dear," said Lady Helen Burton,

noticing the anger and disappointment which flushed Miss Castillain's cheeks, "you must come home with Reggie and me, and stay at Burton for a few days. We will take no refusal, will we, Reggie?"

Reginald, Viscount Lythwood, managed to assert, with his favourite smile and lisp, that it was impossible for *him* to take a refusal from Miss Castillain.

So Louisa, comforted a little, allowed him to hand her to a seat in the handsome coroneted carriage; after which he made himself as comfortable as he could, preparatory to making himself agreeable also.

Viscount Lythwood was languidly aware of the truth of the fact his father perpetually urged upon him, that it would be greatly to his advantage to marry one of the heiresses of old Castillain of Hawkedale. He knew, as well as his father knew, how seldom he would be likely to meet with a girl who possessed so strongly the three recommendations which were pointed out to him in the elder of these heiresses (the younger had been engaged when Lord Lythwood

returned from making the grand tour)—great wealth (that was, of course, the first and weightiest charm), personal beauty, and (not the least weighty) a readiness to be won. All these charms had been pointed out to him, and he was sufficiently wise in his generation to feel the full value of them, and languidly to accept the good the gods provided.

The slight form of the little Viscount leaned affectedly towards Louisa, and his lisping, slow words soon brought the smile back to her face, though they were by no means remarkable for genial or pointed wit.

So the Earl's carriage rolled away, while the High Sheriff's splendid horses impatiently pawed the ground before the chief entrance to the Court.

Marjorie, on her way through the vestibule with Lady Athelston, stopped a moment beside Colonel Stuart's party; a soft bright pink in her cheeks, and a happy light in her eyes, as she watched Neil's mother take the hand of her old companion, and ask where she was going.

"Home with me," said Mrs. Esdaile, trying

to speak genially into the trumpet, though it was a great effort to her. "I cannot spare her yet, nor can Jack. When she is a little stronger, I suppose we must let her brother take her from us again."

"Oh! Lina," whispered Marjorie, in her earnest, glad voice, "I am so happy, and so grateful! If we were not in a crowd, I should kiss you while I say it. Are you going to him now?"

"Colonel Stuart thinks," said Lina, a great glad light shining in her beautiful eyes, "that he can bring him to the Anchorage, and he is going to try. He is going to him now; he thinks Gerard is more likely to come if I do not go yet—that he will come to fetch me."

"Only," smiled Marjorie, "they will not let you go, of course, while you are so weak."

"Oh! I am strong now," the girl answered, with quick pleasure. "This has made me strong all at once."

"You think so now, dear."

"No, I shall not let her go out of my care,

even into her brother's quite yet," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly. "But, all the same, we want to see him at the Anchorage, and as Alick thinks he is more likely to come with him alone, we are going to the hotel to await them."

"If Colonel Stuart thinks that is wisest, it is sure to be so," said Marjorie, gently. "Lina, I shall come to see you and Adelaide to-morrow, and I fancy Lady Althelston will insist on coming too. Now I must snatch a minute to speak to Dorcas; I must, even if Lady Athelston sends all the javelin-men to stop me. Mrs. Cheere has decided to take a fly all the way home, and Colonel Stuart has taken Jet and gone to order it. Just as if it were to be a peculiar vehicle which only he and Jet could choose."

"I think I know why he has taken Jet to that hotel," said Lina, with a slow, glad smile of comprehension.

Then, after Marjorie's assenting nod, she followed Mrs. Esdaile through the portico, little Jack keeping beside her protectingly. Out

upon the steps to them came Neil, his bright head bare, his long blue eyes sparkling with something deeper than excitement.

"Miss Chester, tell me how glad you are; tell me that the first trial of my High Shrievalty has been a happy one for you."

"Happy!" echoed Lina, the old shadow falling over her face.

"Has *ended* happily, at any rate," he corrected, with an anxious gaze.

"It has ended as I never dared to hope that it would end," she answered. "Thank you for being glad for us, Sir Neil."

He felt then just a shade discomfited; it was not for "us" he had been glad. He had only rejoiced exceedingly to see Lina's face without that look of misery which it had worn all day. He lingered beside Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, longing to say more, yet entirely at a loss what to say, as he had rarely been in his life before.

"Here I am, Neil," put in Marjorie, to the rescue. "Now put me into the brougham to your mother. I know she's tired of wait-

ing; and the peculiarity of women is, that they require to be put by gentlemen into carriages, as if they were rugs. Neil, I'm helpless, almost, in my great surprise," she added, turning with him, after her bright little nod into Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, "at the rapid growth of the twin canaries' calves. Why, they must have been in a hot-bed since I saw them last, when they were of quite ordinary dimensions."

"I should not like to see them pricked," laughed Neil.

"I should; it would be such a pleasant reminder of my doll days. I've been as weak as usual, Neil; I've promised to go home with your mother for to-night."

"That's kind, dear!" he answered, folding a shawl about his mother, and receiving placidly the proud, pleased smile with which she rewarded him.

And so, one after another, the carriages drove away, and the crowd dissolved in a manner usual with crowds, and as inexplicable

as the great problem which has to do with the disappearance of pins.

* * * * * * *

There was hardly a sound of the day's excitement heard in the room where Gerard waited; for the tan upon the street deadened all sound of passing wheels, and the bustling, hungry demands had hardly yet begun to disturb the quiet of the hotel.

The twilight of the March evening was creeping slowly down upon the busy town, when the handle of the door was turned with an unsteady awkwardness, and Gerard, watching and waiting, saw the door open to admit Jet's small figure, and pale, eager face.

"Dad! oh, dad!"

Such a cry it was! so full of love, and longing, and overwrought excitement; yet subdued, as were all the child's words and actions now. There was an utter silence in the room. The boy's careworn, anxious little face was hidden on the man's broad

breast, and the strong arms, freed at last were tight and close about him.

"Dad,"—the young voice was the first to break the silence—"will you come with grandmother and me?"

"Not to-night, laddie." Ah! what joy it was to the shy, tender-hearted child to hear the old pet name once more! "But I will come back to you."

"When, father?"

"Not *father*, dear," the young man said. "Don't you remember that story which we learnt off by heart one night?"

"I *must* say 'father,'" whispered the boy, wistfully; "Mrs.—I mean granny, says I may. Father, she's so good to me!"

"I know it, laddie; I saw it to-day." And Gerard's beautiful, warm eyes were looking straight into the child's, with a laughing light in their depths, just as they used to look so often in the old busy, happy, struggling times. "And doesn't it make you proud to have an English history to read at last? But, listen—you mustn't be deluded enough to

fancy that you will find the stories there exactly as I used to tell them. Real historians are apt to forget the parts I used to remember."

Jet's soft, long-forgotten laugh was good to hear.

"You made lots of them up, dad, I can guess now, by your eyes; but—but I can never read the big history that—that—Mr. Jelfrey used to read, because—because that very first night, dad, when I was sitting so miserable by the fire, she—granny, I mean—burnt it; burnt it all, every number, one after another. I know why now; but I was frightened then."

"Now go, dear lad, to granny."

The young man's voice was gentle with an untold gentleness, and the child's face—so wistful and sorrowful now that that night had been recalled—was pressed once more in silence to his own.

A few minutes after that, Jet was driving along the dusky highway to Churchill, his tired head at rest upon his grandmother's

arm, as she sat upright in her corner of the fly, unbent and seemingly unbendable, but with a strange new weakness glittering in her eyes.

And the Colonel and Gerard sat together in the inn.

"Think better of this decision, Spendir (the old name slips out, you see); come with us to-night, and we will let you leave again whenever you choose; even to-morrow, if you wish it. Come and spend this evening with your sister."

"I cannot," the young man answered, with grave decision. "The wish is kind, as all your wishes are, Colonel Stuart; but I cannot—nor can I even explain why."

"Never mind that," put in the Colonel; "I understand without explanation. But I trust you will reconsider your decision; we shall all be so glad to take you home with us."

"Not yet," said Gerard, with a sadness which he strongly fought against; "I have a stain upon my name, and—and the burden is

one I can only bear alone. A stain upon my name, I said! What name have I? Who can imagine, after that scene in court to-day, that I have any name to call my own—or my sister's? Colonel Stuart, can I use my freedom until I have won us the name we inherit? That is my first work."

"But this is absurd, Spendir," exclaimed the Colonel, somewhat hotly. "You are fit now only to rest and sleep; and——. Have you eaten anything to-day?"

"I forget," Gerard answered, absently; "I am not hungry, so I suppose I have."

A hurt and rather puzzled look was on the officer's face as he rang and ordered dinner.

"Spendir," he said then, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "promise to take your dinner heartily as a man should after a long day's fast. If you will not come with me, I will bring your sister to say good-bye; but I will not go until you give me this promise. You will make her most unhappy, too, if you refuse me in this."

"I will try, indeed. Colonel Stuart," he added, with a sudden brightness in his tired eyes, "is Lina really going with you—really going back with Mrs. Esdaile, to your happy, easeful home?"

"She is really coming with us, I am very glad to say," returned the Colonel, his face saddening pitifully; "she is not well enough yet for anything but to rest and recruit. The question now, is whether she will not feel all the pleasure taken away for her by your refusal to come too. Have you thought of this?"

"Colonel Stuart," the young man said, "I cannot think how I can ask more from you when you do so much; but will you really bring her here before I go, just for five minutes—only five minutes?"

This quiet, sad request was just what the Colonel knew would be the indisputable sign that his own proposal was unavailing.

"If you refuse really to join her," he said, "she will, I know, want to accompany you

at once. Of course you will not allow that. It would be ruin to her health to travel now."

"To travel as she must travel with me? Yes, it would be bad for her," the artist said. "I am only too grateful, Colonel Stuart, to leave her in the home you offer her until she is better. I could not take her; but it will be easier to begin my travels and work, if I hear her say good-bye, and pray God speed me."

"Spendir," put in the officer, with sudden earnestness, "let this uncertain search go by. You will wear blamelessly any name you choose. Why search for one which——"

"But the name I seek," Gerard interrupted, with the old dauntless spirit in his dark, worn face, "is my mother's, and I seek it for her. If I can put it on her nameless grave, and see Lina bear it proudly and purely—as she would bear any name —I think I shall have no wish beyond."

"You will have many wishes beyond," laughed Colonel Stuart, hurriedly. "Wishes

are natural and healthy for a brave fellow like yourself."

"Perhaps so," was the answer. "Isn't it Claudio who says that the only medicine the miserable have is hope? It must be true. I am miserable enough, yet I have hope. I cannot say for what, or where I found it; but it is certainly here—even yet."

"Of course," the Colonel answered, pleasantly. "It will always keep you company, go where you will."

"Even with a brand upon me—a nameless convict," added Gerard, with a smile. "Will you tell the master of High Athelston what I am going to do, Colonel Stuart, and that I shall come back when I have found what I seek—not before?"

"I do not trust to that; you are too sensible to stick to that determination, Spendir. Take the journey, but let us see you again soon. In the hall below, you will find your portmanteau packed. I did it myself; no one else has been to the cottage. I packed it with everything I thought you

would need, and that had not been sent you before; and in it is your money, and the key of the cottage. No one is to enter it until you yourself return there. You will be sure of that, because you have the key with you. No one ever *has* entered it yet, except myself that once. There it is as you left it; and so it will be, until you yourself unlock the door. Spendir, you will come back, if only to see your boy again? And we shall take great care of your sister, all of us. You may judge what care Miss Marjorie Castillain will take of her after those messages of hers to you; and you know, by this time, whether my sister and I will not do so."

But Gerard had covered his face now, and hidden it.

"I will fetch her," concluded the Colonel, his voice a little broken as he moved away; "remember you have promised to dine—and I never knew you break your word."

One short half hour, sad and yet happy too, the brother and sister spent together in that quiet room; no one breaking in upon their fare-

well, no one witnessing their brave, hopeful sympathy. Then Lina joined Mrs. Esdaile and Colonel Stuart again, and drove away with them to the pleasant home which had been opened so kindly to her when she had no home in the world to call her own.

And in the silent room she had left, Gerard bravely tried to keep his promise to his one kind friend, but failed sorely. The dinner—not quite untasted—was taken down presently, to his great relief; and then he sat beside the window, and rested in the dark. A poor uneaseful rest it was, for the man whose brain and heart were burning.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHTFALL AMONG THE GRAVES.

A beautiful May morning; its sunshine falling full upon two travellers who lounged against the gate of a roadside station in the south of Devonshire. As they waited for their train, they fell into conversation, chatting of where they had been, and whither they were going, as travellers naturally do, even if their acquaintanceship be only a few minutes old, as was the acquaintanceship of these two.

One was very young in appearance, scarcely more than a boy, and carried a fishing-basket slung across his shoulder. The other was a

young man, too, wanting two years yet of thirty; but he had the look upon his face of one who had lived through the cares and disappointments of a life. Such a handsome face it was though; bearded and sunburnt, with strength in every feature. yet with the gentleness and refinement which, added to strength, forms the most essential manliness; with brave, fearless eyes, in which there lay always, deep down, a steadfast quietude, which seemed to set this man apart from others of his age.

Gerard—for it was he—was listening while his companion idly told of a village which he had gone out of his way to visit, and the young fisherman graciously accepted the eager attention, as a tribute to his powers of description. Naturally; for how could he know that this apparently well-seasoned traveller gave always the same rapt attention to any one who would tell him of a village which he had not yet visited?

"If you had not been coming on to Penzance," the young tourist said, glancing with unconscious admiration into the listening face above

him, "I believe you would really have been tempted to find out this dull and samey little place, which I should never have gone near, but for knowing that the Rector (having been my tutor once) would never forgive me if I passed within access of his place and did not turn aside to see him. But if you *do* find the temptation irresistible, I will direct you across the country."

This was said in laughing irony, and the speaker opened his eyes wide indeed when Gerard gravely accepted the offer, and turned to leave the station, simply waiting for the proffered directions. They were given in much amusement and surprise; and when Gerard had shown that he understood them, the travellers parted with a jest.

"Good morning. If you mean to go out of your way to visit on foot every village and hamlet that you hear of, Winter will comfortably have set in before you see St. Michael's Mount."

"No matter," answered Gerard, pleasantly. "I would rather visit a village I've never seen before, than St. Michael's Mount which I've seen a hundred times; and I'm strong enough to

walk any distance. Good morning, and thank you."

And so, half laughing, he started on his way; the old hope, which had lived through the sad experience of many years, making his step light, though day after day he had been wearying himself to meet only defeat and disappointment.

The sun was pouring its hot beams upon the white highway, when at last the grey tower of a village church shone out among the trees, silvery in the sunshine. Gerard's heart throbbed as he neared it; but then so many times before had his heart throbbed with hope, when he felt that there was just the possibility of his engrossing, long-nursed wish, meeting its fulfilment!

On the outskirts of the village, he passed a handsome red house in a lawn. That was the Rectory, of course. Then came the cottages, scattered here and there on the roadside; then a high square house, with pillars at the door, and a brilliant signboard above.

Pleasantly returning the salutation of the comely landlord of this comely village inn,

Gerard walked on towards the church. It lay a hundred yards farther on, separated from the road by a high railing, the gate in which stood now wide open. Gerard, with his foot upon the step, and his hand upon the gate, stood a moment, breathing quickly. Before him was an old wooden porch, with a leaning cross upon it; below that, a solitary gravestone lay in the footway; and these things—so strange to him, yet so familiar—made his pulses throb, and dimmed his eyes, as no tears could dim them.

An old man, working in the churchyard, saw him stand so for long minutes, and waited curiously for an opportunity to open a conversation, as old sextons have delighted in doing, ever since (if not before) the days of Hamlet.

"A fine old church, sir. Do'ee wish to see it?"

He had taken heart of grace, and approached Gerard, rather taken aback, though, by the bewildered gaze which met his.

Gerard shook his head, passing on towards

the grave outside the porch, and bending to read the words upon it.

MAGDALEN.

This simple stone shall bear a simple line—
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine.

Not a word did Gerard utter, even in a whisper to himself; no thought even shaped itself to him; but he knew that a great and overpowering gratitude filled his heart to overflowing.

He leaned against the church porch, weak and trembling. It was not because the old man's eyes were upon him that he did not hide his face there, sobbing like a child. It was only that the truth had not yet entered his heart, was only surging wildly in his pulses, giving him a joy and hope that were confused like madness.

"Would 'ee like the key of the church, sir?"

Slowly the words made themselves clear to Gerard.

"Yes," he answered, unsteadily. "Will you go and——"

But here his voice faltered again, for as he looked up he caught sight of the old sundial, with its moss-grown pedestal.

"I'll fetch 'ee the key, sir."

"But," said Gerard, looking into the old man's inquisitive face, while his eyes for the first time lost their far-away, engrossed expression; "but I want more than that. I want to see the register. Can I?"

"Why not, sir? Parson 'll have to come himself, that's all. I'll go and fetch un."

So he went, while Gerard sat in the porch alone, trying to make the wonderful familiarity of this place distinct to his bewildered, grateful thoughts, and trying, too,—poor Gerard!—to prepare himself for another disappointment, perhaps to be the last, as it would be the greatest, of all.

More than an hour had passed for him so, when the old man returned with the clergyman of the village. Before he and Gerard had reached the vestry together—after talking a few minutes in the porch—the clergyman had, as he fancied, read a whole story in the young man's dark,

thoughtful face, and handsome, shabbily attired figure; and he not only acknowledged him a gentleman, but even one whose knowledge had, by some means, sounded unusual depths.

"The marriage register of twenty-nine years ago," he repeated, taking the musty old books from a safe which he had unlocked. "That would be the year—— Ah! here it is! Before my time, a good bit. What is it, Dare? I will come out into the aisle to you. Will you excuse me?" he added, turning to Gerard, who tried to smile his thanks for the thoughtful act.

May—June—July—Yes, that was the month his mother left the old farm near the coast. There was only one marriage registered through the whole month. Ah!

Down upon him, as he sat alone in the dusty vestry, had come a flood of radiant, dazzling light. Ah! what a pitiful heaven had sent it round him in his doubt, and fear, and shame! Here was the marriage register of Sir Gerard Athelston, Baronet, of High Athelston, in the

County of Highshire, with Magdalen, only daughter of Hiram Dymocke, of Tresean Farm, in the County of Cornwall; and the signatures were there, and the date, and—and—— Down on his knees upon the stones, fell Gerard; his head bowed upon the paper, and all his heart poured out in gratitude to his God for this.

"I am very glad to have been of service to you," said the Rector, when Gerard and he stood in the church porch together again, "and I shall recollect exactly what it is, when I am called upon to show the register to others."

Gerard thanked him with a clasp of the hand which was strong, and firm, and gentle, like himself; and the old sexton, too, had his handshake before the crown was slipped into his palm; then both the clergyman and gravedigger stood watching the young man, with rather a novel kind of interest.

From the gate, Gerard gave another glance (such a lingering one!) back at the church porch and the low grave; then he walked away rapidly towards the station, his eyes dim

with gladness, his lips whispering again and again his mother's name and Lina's, and his own, which had been his father's.

"Magdalen Athelston — Magdalen, Lady Athelston; Gerard Athelston — Sir Gerard Athelston."

Gerard never entertained the possibility of there being no other train which would take him to Penzance that day; he only felt now that he must hasten on to Tresean, and tell his grandfather the good, happy news—how he had found at last what he had sought so long. He had no thought to-day to give to the injustice which had caused the old home to be closed against him and Lina, as it had years before been closed against their mother. He had no thought to give to his grandfather's hardness and cruelty; he only felt that, first of all, he must go and gladden him by telling him how true were his daughter's dying words. He must make bright again every remembrance of her. He must bring back to the old man's heart the love that had once been so tender. How happy it would make him!

There *was* another train for Penzance that evening, and Gerard took his seat in it, his heart still beating quickly in his great excitement. Tresean lay eight or nine miles from Penzance, and there was no regular conveyance going at that hour; but nothing could delay or discourage Gerard now. He set out to walk along the coast, every step of which was familiar to him, as quickly as if most of the previous hours of that day had been spent in resting instead of walking; and hardly had his step once slackened, when the old farm itself, the chill, unloving home of his youth and boyhood, came in sight.

Quickly and more quickly his pulses beat. The weariness (though it might cruelly tell upon him by-and-by) was not even thought of now. But there was one spot he must see before he went back to his mother's early home—her nameless and unhonoured grave.

Leaving the farm upon his left, he turned up a stony little lane, from which he could see, far beyond him, the church tower, rising dim and solitary against the dusk of the

evening sky. Down below him, in the little wood he skirted, the smoke curled up from a solitary cottage.

That was the keeper's cottage where his mother died. He should like to go there—he *must* go there—before he left Cornwall again; to claim his name and his inheritance; after he had seen his grandfather and made him happy. What would he say? What would the old man think? Would he show his happiness? Would it overpower him? Sudden joy was as hard to bear as—harder than anything, Gerard thought to-night.

How well Gerard remembered the narrow, steep road! How many, and many, and many a time he and Lina had walked this way to church, and thought it so long! Two miles, it was considered. Why, it did not seem a mile to-night; for was not there the church just before him now?

Gerard knew where to find the curious old Cornish stile into the churchyard, though the gate might be locked; but should he be able, before the deepening twilight grew and gather-

ed into night, to find that grave on which there had never been a stone? He had only seen it once. It was not until the night before he left Cornwall with Lina, that his grandfather's sister had told him his mother's story; and only in the morning before they started had he been shown the grave which was his mother's, lying under the rough stone wall which bounded the churchyard. But if the light would only last long enough, he had no fear of not recognising it.

Slowly Gerard went up the narrow, stony path towards where he knew it lay, his head bent in the softened, dying light. There were no heavy trees to intersect the sky; the letters on most of the stones could still be read without trouble. How familiar it all seemed to him! Here was the great square stone, the words on which he and Lina, as little children, had so often puzzled over in vain.

"Sacred to the Memory of Christian Polivy, and his wife Grace. The former substituted a temporal for an eternal existence on the fiftieth anniversary of his birth; the latter

relinquished this transitory state, in the agreeable prospect of a superior one, on the identical day in the succeeding year."

Gerard moved on, musing why such words should be chosen just to mark the simple passage of death.

"The simple passage of death."

He repeated the words, wondering why they had risen so readily to his lips.

Here was another well-remembered headstone, which Lina and he used to notice and wonder over:

> "Husband, farewell!—my life is past!
> I loved you well while life did last.
> Lord grant you joy where'er you are:
> Yourself prepare to follow me."

Why had the words been left, when the poor husband, to whom the farewell (and the warning) had been addressed, had himself been laid there only five days afterwards, as the words below proved? And why, mused Gerard, absently, did the stone-mason sacrifice the old lady's rhyme to his own peculiar notions of grammar?

Ah! that was a new stone! Its whiteness made the large black letters stand out clear and striking! Gerard's eyes (searching earnestly and untiringly) fell upon them and rested there.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Over and over again the words seemed to come before him, even after he had passed the new, white headstone.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

A little farther on lay the grave he sought, just under the wall there—only a few steps farther on. Was that it? Slowly Gerard approached and bent above it. Yes, this was it—this narrow, grass-covered hillock under the wall. Gently, as if the stillness of the time and place had wrapped themselves about him, he knelt and laid his two hands softly on the grave.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Not written there, these words—only uttered.

He had found it at last; this grave with no name upon it, this grave which had lain unnoticed here for nearly thirty years; and *he* had the right to bring the sunshine full upon it, and make his mother's name an honoured one.

Was it the great mental excitement, or the bodily fatigue, which was telling upon him now? Making no effort against this new weariness, he lay down upon the ground, and laid his face upon the turf, whispering one word as he had never whispered it in all his life before:

"Mother!"

Lying in the stillness there, Gerald felt a strange, new happiness creep into his heart; a happiness such as he had never even dreamed of; though, in all his suffering and degradation, he *had* dreamed of happiness—poor Gerard!

The darkness of the Spring night came softly down upon the hallowed ground, and still Gerard Athelston lay there with his face upon his mother's grave, dimly conscious that a great blessing had been given both to him and to

those he loved, but no longer quite conscious what that blessing was. All the passion which had troubled his restless heart for years, was quieted now. All the scorn and rebellion which had ever risen to his lips, was softened now. His eyes, so calm and trustful, and so full of rest and quietness, could never darken again to anger or contempt.

The stars came peeping, one by one, from the far-off heaven; and shone, calm and tender, down upon the quiet dead. One fell, swift and bright, across the wide, dim grey, and Gerard watched it dreamily, wondering if it could be that angels fell from Heaven now, as they had fallen long ago. And the darkness deepened, and the night came down upon the silence—softly and tenderly, however treacherously, there among the homes of the dead.

CHAPTER X.

AT HOME AGAIN.

IN the May sunshine, pouring warmly through the large bow-window of the library at the Anchorage, Lina Chester sat, with her eyes fixed upon the winding drive which led from the lawn gate to the front entrance of the house. Opposite to her, Marjorie Castillain knelt on the soft white mat, and, leaning from the open window, played with the dainty roses which looked so brightly up to greet the sun-rays.

All through the Spring months, a certain quietness, new to Marjorie, had gradually grown to belong to her, and even those who

knew her best, and loved her best, could scarcely comprehend it. Could it be, they said, because the friend whom she had taken to her heart, seemed drooping as the Summer came? Or could it be because the time was near now for her marriage with Sir Neil Athelston, according to the old agreement? Or could it be because her sister was even colder and more harsh to her now than she had ever been before?

What could it be? Often and often Lina wondered, as she was wondering now, sitting and watching Marjorie in the sunshine. Often and often Neil wondered, recalling the bright laughter and heedless raillery which for all her life had belonged to her. Often and often Mrs. Esdaile wondered, looking in vain for an answer either from Neil or from Marjorie herself. Often and often Colonel Stuart wondered, loitering alone about his pleasant garden, in the dusk of these calm Spring evenings, and letting the thoughts crowd thick and fast upon him then, which he had put aside all day, and which, (unshared),

must slowly do their part in making the grave and thoughtful soldier older than his years.

But the question was answered to none. Did even Marjorie herself know exactly what it was which made her step slow, and her eyes so often far away and sad—the radiant, laughing eyes? Sometimes, watching anxiously and vainly for the return of strength in Lina's frail form, she fancied that she understood it. Sometimes, watching Neil hurrying up that sunny gravel path, she fancied again that she understood it. But never, except when she was quite alone and recalling grave, kind, helpful words which she always seemed to disregard, did she approach the truth.

"Lina, do you notice how naturally it comes to one to watch the entrance gate, from this open window?" said Marjorie, turning to look into her companion's face, with a startled look, as if conscious of having been watching for rather a noticeably long time.

"It comes sadly natural to me now," said Lina, her own eyes coming slowly home from

their distant gaze. "Are you very tired of seeing me do it, Miss Marjorie!"

"I spoke because I fancied you would notice *me*," answered Marjorie, leaning her head against the window and looking at Lina with a smile. "I cannot think why I do it either, for Neil's receding figure has been invisible for half an hour at least. Don't you think Neil looked dreadfully harassed to-day, Lina?"

"I hardly saw him for one minute," replied Lina, with a sudden weariness in her tone.

"No; and that proves for Neil that there is one thing he tries to do which is not for his own pleasure. He will not force his presence where he knows it is not welcomed. In that, he is strangely altered. In one or two other respects he is altered, too," added Marjorie, her eyes filled with bright tenderness as they met Lina's. "You would hardly notice the change, dear, as I should—I who have known him so long—but one year has changed him more than could ten such years as those he spent before last Spring; and the change is plainly written in his face. He looks ten years

older than he looked that day, among the fallen leaves, when he asked me so complacently to be his wife. He looks a man of six-and-thirty now, yet he is only six-and-twenty."

"No; only six-and-twenty—just six-and-twenty," said Lina absently, thinking of her own age and Gerard's, and of how soon after her father's death his widow had married Neil's father.

"One thing that tells upon him is the constant worrying of his mother," resumed Marjorie, curiously watching Lina's face. "Continual dropping will wear away a stone, they tell us; and the continual dropping of Lady Athelston's fretfulness will, of course, wear away Neil's comfort and good looks. Nothing pleases her now; nothing seems to her fancy to go rightly at High Athelston; nothing will please her again until *you* go back to her. I never saw a rudderless vessel," concluded Marjorie, with the old, swift brightness of laughter in her eyes, "but I should fancy Lady Athelston looks as like one as—as she feels."

"But is not Sir Neil her rudder now, as he

has always been?" inquired Lina, seeing that Miss Castillain waited for her reply.

"No, she feels that he has failed her. She began to think it when he took upon himself to make her dismiss Fletcher, for the tales she had been in the habit of composing about you. She went on thinking it when he got this new sort of quiet, determined way about him; and she finished thinking it when she found he had some purpose of his own, and kept to it. One thing upholds her, though; that is, the cessation of hostilities between Neil and myself. 'Marjorie, my dear,' she says to me, plaintively, 'you have learned at last, as I always prognosticated you would, how much more indulgent Neil is when you let him have entirely his own way. I knew you would learn this before your marriage; and now I feel sure you will be the happiest wife in Highshire!' Poor old lady! I could heartily laugh, if it were not that she is as much in earnest over this idea as she can be over anything. Her management of her only son has not been all-successful, has it? Poor Neil!—poor Neil!"

Again Marjorie's eyes turned to the scene beyond the open window, and lingered far off again, with that gentleness which was utterly sad in the girl whose every glance had used to be armed with fun and raillery.

"Ah! Lina, look! There is a curious sight. Mrs. Cheere coming through the gate; coming up to the house, I declare. I should like to run and meet her; I should if—this were my own house."

A sudden movement Marjorie made. Clasping one of the rose-sprays in her two hands, she bent her face within them, too, inhaling the scent thirstily; but Lina saw the soft tint of the rose itself mount rapidly from cheek to brow. Unconsciously, in her thoughts, Lina repeated those last few words, seeking a cause for this; but before she was aware of their meaning, she, too, had caught sight of Dorcas walking rather hastily up the lawn. Then, with a sudden flash of hope, which was literally akin to pain, she half rose in her seat.

"Oh! do you think," she faltered, "Miss

Marjorie, is it possible she has news for *me?*"

"My dear," said Marjorie, forgetting every other thought in her sympathy for the girl who had waited so patiently through these Spring months for her brother's return, "she would hardly be the one to meet the news before ourselves; she is always welcome here, so it is no wonder that she comes; but we shall soon hear."

Then Marjorie, rising from the floor, took up her work, and, as she sewed, she chatted pleasantly to draw Lina's thoughts from those possible—only just possible—tidings of Mrs. Cheere's.

Hardly ten minutes had been spent so, when Marjorie caught sight of Dorcas walking back again towards the gate, with Colonel Stuart at her side. She made no allusion to this, but on his return he came straight into the room to the girls. Searchingly Marjorie's eyes met his as he entered, and the question that they asked so mutely, he answered, with a quiet smile.

"Miss Chester," he said, gently, as he stood beside her, "I have ordered the pony to be harnessed in Adelaide's little carriage, for I want you to have a drive. Such a day as this should not be wasted indoors. Miss Marjorie, you walked from Hawkedale, so I want you to have the drive too. If I say so, shall you immediately refuse, *because* I say so?"

"May I drive, Lina?" she asked, her eyes gentle and wistful as she read his gaze, and the cool contradiction far enough from her lips now.

"Thank you, Colonel Stuart," said Lina, her weak hands locked before her as she rose. "Has Gerard come?"

"Yes, he has come," the officer answered, hardly wondering at the question, because he knew how ever-present with her was the hope of Gerard's return, "and he is at the old home. He went straight to the cottage in Nether Lane, as I fancied he would, and Mrs. Cheere has just been to tell us."

"He—he did not come himself?" faltered Lina.

"He would be tired, and hardly care to have the trouble of greeting us all yet, however anxious we might be to see him. Besides, he would naturally wish to meet you first alone."

"Thank you; then—may I go?"

Colonel Stuart opened the door without answering. Something, either in the news he had just heard, or in the girl's face, made him fear his own voice.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, when Lina had passed out of hearing, "you are her best companion now. She will not care for me to take her. Will you? I will tell Adelaide as soon as she returns."

"I will drive her to the cottage," Marjorie answered, softly, "and then come back. If you and Adelaide let me, I can fetch her again later on. Colonel Stuart, I am afraid he is ill."

"I am afraid so, too," he answered. "He looks so, Dorcas says; but he is travel-tired, I daresay. When his sister has been with him, I may go."

Very silently the two girls drove through the

town, and then along the lane to the two white cottages. Once they spoke of the primroses on the edgebank; once of the bells, which were ringing merrily as they passed through the town; and once or twice of the pony, who capered briskly along the sunny lane; but never once of the thoughts nearest their hearts; and each time quietly, as if in the hush of a shadow they could not even understand.

"Good-bye, Lina dear," said Marjorie, softly, as the pony stood before the wicket gate, which Mrs. Esdaile's trim little groom held open, "I will come back for you in two or three hours' time."

Then she turned and drove away, without waiting for any reply; and Lina hastened up the garden path, trembling unaccountably as she neared the cottage. Bright and warm as the sun shone without, there was a fire burning in the grate, which had been brushed and polished by hands that had more experience than those which used to try to keep it bright in the old time. Drawn close beside it, was a stiff little horsehair couch, which Marjorie

would have recognised as Mrs. Cheere's, but which Lina had never seen before.

Gerard was not lying on it now; at the sound of her step he had risen with a strength of excitement, which, for the moment that it lasted, was like the strength of old times—just for the moment that it lasted. And while he held her in his close and tender clasp, he whispered that he had found what he sought; found it all just as their mother remembered.

"Each day, each hour of all those two months," he said, "I felt that I might find it, and knew that when I did I should come home to tell you. How could I write to tell you, dear? And could I write to say I had *not* found it, when, before the letter reached you, I might have done so? You see now, Lina, why you have waited. Dear, was not hope with you all the time, as it was with me?"

Lina, her eyes wide and bright, and her breath coming quickly, stood to listen to his words, both her hands held fast in his.

"Gerard," she faltered, trembling feebly in her untold joy, "it is worth waiting for. Our

own mother's name can live pure and bright in our own hearts for ever; but—but you are tired and ill."

"A little, dear," he answered, gently; "but I have not told you half I have to tell. Lina, oh, Lina, you should have seen the old man's joy when I told him of our mother's marriage: his joy, and his remorse, and his regret, and something else—something like *love*, even for you and me. He would never have consented to my leaving him again yet, but that I have come to fetch you;—and to let that selfish interloper know that what I told him I was going to find I have found; and to——"

"To see the old place again, Gerard," she put in, her quiet voice soothing and calming the excitability which she knew must hurt him, while he looked so weak and ill; the excitability which had always belonged to his nature, in spite of all its patient, brave forbearance.

She laid his head back upon the cushion of the hard little couch, and kissed his feverish lips again and again; starting a few minutes

afterwards, to note how strangely, suddenly chill they had grown.

"The room seems colder than it used to be," he said, his lips quivering on his teeth as he looked round. "Is it because it has been so long uninhabited?"

"I will soon have the cottage warm and bright and sunny, Gerard dear," said his sister, her voice a little broken as she noticed how richly the May sunshine shone into the room. "For us two, living together again as we have lived so long, this will be quite a pleasant home, until we are both strong enough to travel."

"Let me look at you, my dear. Have the worry and the trouble I have caused you, left their marks upon you still?"

"I never had fatigue or anxiety to bear without stupidly showing how weakly I bore it—had I, Gerard?" she asked, only anxious now that he should feel a dread of *her* travelling, because she dreaded it so much for him.

And while she softly moved about the room, giving it, with the sweetness and brightness of

her presence, a look of home which it had never had before, he followed every movement, with a deep sadness in his beautiful eyes; wondering if the worries and the troubles he had meant (of which she had so large a share, and which she had borne so much more bravely than she guessed of), were over now, at least for her.

"I shall go up-stairs presently, Gerard, to make your bed-room pleasant, but Mrs. Cheere has put a fire, so I need not go quite yet," she said, coming, as she spoke, to sit beside him, where she could gaze into his face, without his reading all the yearning and the fear in hers.

"How long will they let you stay with me to-day?"

"How long, Gerard!" she echoed, with a smile. "For always, now. Do you think I could go anywhere without you now?"

"Lina, will you go back to the old farm, just to see grandfather once again, my pet?"

"Wherever—whenever you take me," she whispered softly, in her new, keen anguish of fear.

"You will find him greatly changed," he went on quietly, leaving her words unnoticed except by the mute gesture of taking in his the small thin hand, which she had laid caressingly upon his shoulder, "and I know you will never remember anything beyond his disappointment, and the long punishment of his suspicion; nothing else—nothing against him, dear. And—and he wishes to see you."

"I will go with you; I shall be glad to go *then*," Lina answered, emphasizing the last word.

"Not yet, perhaps; but you will go when you can; it will cheer and comfort the old man, and it will do you good too, dear. I am very glad I saw him; I am very glad I had that happy news to take him. I—I like to remember how his face grew changed and softened while I was there."

In the silence that followed his words, Gerard could hear Lina's quick, pained breathing, but he only drew her hand tighter and closer in his own.

"And you will go to our mother's grave,

Lina, and you will have a stone put above with her name on it, just as she saw that name upon the grave when she was married—there, as it is in my sketch. But here—in the chancel here, where the names of all our house have been emblazoned for so many years—hers must have its place. You will have it added, Lina, just below her husband's, with the title and the dates and all. The space is there, you know, and her name should be with his. She loved him, and was his first wife. I owe this to my mother. You will remember?"

"Yes, just as *you* will remember it," she said, still fighting with the fear which was growing more and more cruelly tangible.

"And you will do it for me, dear, just as I should have done it myself?" he added, with a quiet content in his voice. "But there is one thing more that you must promise me. Listen, Lina, and promise it solemnly, for I will not speak of it again. There is the stain of murder upon *my* name, so it must have no place among those of our house. Lina, make me this promise. While that stain rests upon my name (and I

know now that it must be always there), no marble or stone shall be engraved to me."

"Gerard," the girl whispered, when she had promised (as she would have promised anything he asked her), and laying her hand upon his brow, burning now, as it had been chill before, "what has given you this—this cold, I suppose it is?"

"Sometimes I fancy that I caught it that night in the churchyard," he answered, tiredly. "Sometimes I fancy I have felt it coming on ever since I tried to escape. Don't think of it, love," he added, checking himself suddenly, when he met her troubled eyes. "When will they come to fetch you from me?"

"Miss Marjorie will be here soon, but not to take me from you, Gerard. I can never go."

"Lina," he said, looking up lovingly into her pale face, "you look better than you looked that terrible day two months ago; and just as beautiful—more beautiful, I think, my little lily. I almost wonder that the people here, who had known Sir Gerard Athelston, did not

see and remark upon your likeness to him. Could they think the beauty which they boast of, and which fills the house with portraits of him, was a common thing among our Cornish cliffs?"

Then Lina, glad to turn the subject from that other thought, told him of the vague idea of a resemblance which both Sir Neil and his mother had often puzzled over in vain.

"Even Miss Marjorie Castillain," she said, "was struck by it once; but she knew exactly of whose portrait I reminded her."

"Did she?" asked Gerard, thoughtfully. "But of course she never guessed why. Lina, I am so grateful to think that she will always be your friend. Your inheritance will bring you no truer blessing than her friendship, dear. If right had been done us in the years gone by, she—she might have been my friend too; but it makes a coward of me, even now, to think of the breadth and depth and height of that *if*, while our lives have been— But that is over," he said, again checking himself at sight of the pain upon her face; "and, Lina, you will make

up for all, when our inheritance is yours. You will make up, as far as you may, for the long years that its owners have wasted. You understand, pet; you will understand it utterly when the power is in your hands. No need to tell my weak wishes to you, when your heart is always tender and warm for those who are poor, or solitary, or mistrusted, as—as we have been, my dear."

"Gerard, hush!—oh, hush!" she sobbed, falling on her knees beside the couch, and throwing her arms about him. "Hush! We will go together—together. If not, I can never go."

"But if the gates of another home—far, far brighter, and far, far more beautiful—are opened for me at the same time, dear," he whispered, softly, "could I choose High Athelston, even if the choice were mine?"

"But, Gerard, those gates are always open. Oh! don't leave me yet," she cried, in the selfish anguish of this new grief.

"Not yet," he answered, with ineffable

tenderness, "but too soon to make it worth while to take possession with you of your home."

"*Your* home, Gerard; you know it is *your* home, even at this moment."

"Not in the eyes of the world; and against I have made it all clear there, I shall be tired, and—and ready to long for possession of the one beyond. I wonder how soon I can see Sir Neil? Tell me of them all, Lina, especially of Colonel Stuart."

And she told him all the bright and pleasant things she could remember, while a look of quiet happiness stole into his worn face.

CHAPTER XI.

MARJORIE DECIDES.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN had driven Mrs. Esdaile's ponies so far along the Bleaborough road, that Mrs. Esdaile's groom, from the seat behind her, felt it at last a duty to remind her where they were. Marjorie acknowledged the reminder with her quiet, pleasant smile, and slowly turned the ponies' heads back towards Churchill. Even when they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, she waited still in her seat, so unwilling was she even yet to disturb the brother and sister.

At last, rousing herself from her long, sad

reverie, she gave the reins to the groom, and went up to the door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage.

"Yes, they are together there, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, quite gently, in answer to Marjorie's question. "I keep in here quietly; they don't want *me*. I was glad in my heart to be able to help a little when he first came; to put a fire (for he was starved as if it was December instead of May), and something of that; but I'm not wanted now."

"And you, Jet, have you seen him, dear?" asked Marjorie, with her gentle hand on the child's drooping head.

"He would be there all the time, if he could, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, with a wonderful softening smile upon her face; "but we know—Jet and I both know—what quiet is worth for those that are ill and tired. So we wait a bit."

With her own eyes growing a little dim, as she met those of the woman whom she had always known hard and callous until the story of Gerard's life had stirred her, Marjorie turned

quietly away, and tapped at the door of the other cottage.

"It is good to have you back, Mr. Spendir," she said, as she stood with her hand in Gerard's; her pitiful eyes betraying, against her will, their sad surprise at the change in him.

"It is good to see you, even for a moment, in this room," he said, a feverish colour mounting to his cheeks.

"I will stay a little if you will take your old place," she returned, sitting easily down beside the couch. "Lie back, just as you were lying when I came in, and then I can feel that I may stay more than a moment. I promised to come for Lina; but I know it would be useless to ask her to return with me, unless you came too."

Gratefully Lina smiled her thanks.

"I could not leave Gerard," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, "I have never seen you since you spoke so kindly and so bravely for me in court. May I thank you now, for

the remembrance of your words is as clear to me yet as it was on that first day. And I want to tell you how I did it—yes, please let me; I want to tell it you myself; the rest—all about this last journey of mine and its result—Magdalen will tell you afterwards. We fought together, as they said, on the very brink of the pool. We had met there, and, in our anger and impatience, we hardly heeded where we stood. We fought equally, as the world would say—he had the greater skill and I the greater strength—but often and often since then—*always* since then—I have known that I had no real excuse in God's sight for that deed, hardly more than I should have had if I had *known* that I flung him to his death."

"We all understand—" began Marjorie, earnestly; but he stopped her with a quick, beseeching glance.

"No, please, don't excuse me. I can have no excuse to offer presently before the Judgment Seat above. I had my own work to do; why did I think of his? Miss Marjorie," he con-

tinued, presently, "I should like you to know how often you lightened that work for me, and brightened the life I led here, giving me a little glimpse of what other men's lives hold."

"And I want to tell you, Gerard,"—Marjorie spoke in grave and unaffected simplicity, as if she knew this talk between them was no ordinary talk, and needed no ordinary forms,—"how you have helped me (without knowing it) in making my own life a little less useless. But—but, after all, I cannot tell it you, I see. Gerard," she broke off, "you have found that church, and proved Sir Gerard's first marriage. I knew what you went to do, and I have been almost as anxious as Lina. I can see that you have succeeded, and I expected it, for I always felt the story was a true one. Ah! how different all our lives might have been, if this truth had never falsely and wickedly been concealed! But I must not stay longer and weary you," she added, seeing how the feverish colour came and went upon his worn and tired face. "Some time you will let me come again."

"I wish," said Gerard, leaning against the couch, when he rose to bid her good-bye, and speaking with grave earnestness; "I wish I felt sure you would be happy when—when you bear my mother's name. Let me think of it as my mother's name, Miss Marjorie, and to be one day yours! I wish I felt quite sure you would be happy then."

"How?" exclaimed Marjorie, while a bright flush mounted to the very roots of her hair. "Your wife will be Lady Athelston, Gerard."

He looked into her face, with a little of the old warm happiness in his eyes.

"It would not be worth while taking the title from Sir Neil, just for such a little while," he said; "it would only have to go back to him. And his wife, and his son's wife, and *his* son's wife, on and on, will be those who will wear my mother's title, though so much that has always gone with it must now go to Lina. I like to think of *you* wearing it, Miss Castillain. I—I only wish I knew or felt sure that it would bring you a great happiness,

such as life sometimes holds for such as you."

"I wish you would never think of me as I am going to be," said Marjorie, with her rare wistfulness, "but always as what I am."

"I cannot help thinking of the one, and trying to picture the other," Gerard answered. "I do so little now, that my dreams and idle fancies have all their own way, and I try to picture the future of those who have been so kind to me. Like Orlando—isn't it, Miss Marjorie?—I have been able to look into happiness through other men's eyes."

"If you ever care to fancy what *my* life will be, Gerard," the girl said, very softly, and almost solemnly, as she laid her hand in his, "I hope it will make the fancy brighter for you to know that it can never be so listless and heedless a life again as it always had been until I knew you and Lina. And you must *never* picture it as spent with Neil, for I never shall be Lady Athelston."

A startled surprise, almost amounting to pain, had at first filled Gerard's eyes as she spoke,

and no answering words rose to his lips. Lina's heart beat painfully in the short, deep silence, the meaning of which neither of the girls could, either then or afterwards, even faintly comprehend.

"Gerard, are you so sorry?" his sister asked, at last, only anxious for him to break this pause.

"So glad," he answered, just in his old, clear, happy tones, and now with all the old gladness in his smile.

Then Marjorie bade good-bye, and went; and as she drove slowly back, in the calm sunset light, her thoughts lingered still with the brother and sister, and she had no need to hide their sadness and hopelessness now, as she always would when any eyes could read and interpret them.

"How hard it was," she whispered to herself, as she turned the ponies slowly into the lawn at the Anchorage, "to hide from Lina the shock I felt at the first sight of him. Ah! the long anxiety, and the ceaseless work, and the meagre life, have told upon him now; as well as that

horrible confinement before March. What can be done to counteract all these?"

And no smile came to Marjorie's face, even when Jack Esdaile ran up and sprang beside her in the carriage. The wheels rolled on lightly over the gravel. The rich, sweet breath of the hawthorn made the air fragrant around her. The red light, lingering in the western sky, shone dazzlingly on all the windows of the low, white house she loved as she had never loved her home. Upon the steps, against the rich background of clustering roses, Colonel Stuart stood waiting to receive her. And still Marjorie's face was grave and thoughtful, and, without giving up the reins, or leaving her seat when the ponies stopped, she asked if she might drive on to Hawkedale.

"Tell William to take his seat again, Colonel Stuart," she pleaded, with a glance at the groom, "and I will send the phaeton back by him."

"You may stay at home now, William," the Colonel said, "I am going to drive on. Jack, run in, and, when those ladies are gone, tell mamma that I am taking Miss Marjorie home,

and that Miss Chester is not coming back to-day. Say that Marjorie is coming again to-morrow, and that I will tell her everything else when I return."

"Now, Miss Marjorie, will you tell me of them?" he asked, when she had moved her seat, and he had taken the reins.

So she told him all she thought of Gerard; all the hopeless thoughts which she had hidden before.

"It will weary him for me to go to-night," he said; "but I must bring him home with me in the morning. Rest and ease, with care and nourishment, will soon do their work in restoring a fine frame and constitution such as his."

"They may;—please God they will," said the girl, still with the rare, sweet gravity upon her face, which Colonel Stuart so often pondered over now.

* * * * * *

"There is one thing which I must do at once," mused Marjorie through that solitary evening—for Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were dining at Burton—"I must tell Neil what I told

Sir Gerard Athelston—how funny it sounds!—this evening. It is due to him to know (now that others know it) how I can never be his wife. I will write to him in the morning. I fancy he must know—because now he understands what real love is—how impossible it would be that he and I should marry. He and I! so impossible it is; and he will see this as I see it, now that he knows how ungovernable one's love is.

CHAPTER XII.

NEIL AND MARJORIE TELL THE TRUTH.

COLONEL STUART had been at the cottage all the morning, but had not taken Gerard and Lina back with him to the Anchorage, as he had intended, for Gerard was not fit to be removed. The Colonel had sent at once for a physician from Bleaborough; but the chief prescription had been for rest, and the chief words had been pitying ones for Lina, when she read the hopelessness which his simple directions betrayed. And now the Colonel had sauntered down the lane with him, towards the Anchorage, where his carriage waited, and where he was to lunch.

"Did you send and ask Sir Neil Athelston to

come, Lina," asked Gerard, when they had been some time alone.

"Yes, dear. Jet went. It pleases him to do anything for you. It seems his only pleasure just now."

"Dear little fellow," Gerard said, smiling as he used to smile upon the child. "It is such a joy to me to think he will be cared for always. His grandmother loves him really—doesn't she, Lina?—and you will have the power to do all that money can do for him, and the love to do it as no one else could. Lina, he is not like his father, is he?—is he, dear?"

The wistful questioning of the weak, low voice went to Lina's heart. She seemed to see, for the first time, how anxiously he had brought the child up in their poverty, looking always forward to his manhood.

"I should think his father, as a boy, must have been as unlike Jet as it is possible for any boy to have been," she answered, confidently.

"I think so—I hope so. I wish Sir Neil would come."

Then, almost as the words were uttered, Lina

heard Sir Neil's step on the garden path. He came in quietly, a resolute look upon his face, such as Gerard had never seen there before.

"I did not know you were so ill," he said, standing beside the couch, and slowly withdrawing his eyes from Lina.

Then he ran his fingers through his curls and looked longingly at the hat which he had taken off and put down as he entered; for Lina was gone now, and he was alone with the man of whom he had thought with contempt through many months, and it was no use trying to think of him with contempt now; and—and—what could he say? What had he been brought there to say? Why had Lina gone away, and where was she?

Lying on the bed up-stairs, was Lina; with her face hidden. To lie so, in silent, solitary prayer, was a rest unspeakable for the anxious girl, and so she did not move until the sound of the opening door reached her. Then she rose, drawing her hand a moment across her tired

eyes, and went down stairs again to take her place by Gerard's couch.

"Lina, Sir Neil bade me wish you good-bye. He would have liked to see you, but I knew you would not wish to come."

"No, Gerard."

Then there was a silence between them, which Gerard broke at last, with an anxious questioning in his voice.

"Magdalen, Sir Neil will not believe that you refuse to take, at once, the home and wealth that you inherit legally."

"*Never* without you, Gerard," she cried, in quick dissent.

"It is too late for me, dear. I told Sir Neil exactly what you said," he added, presently, almost as if in haste to break her silence; "and, Lina, he refused to take advantage of my death. He must have the title—he knows that, though he didn't mention it—but he resigns everything else. Are you surprised?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly, "very much surprised—even now."

"Even now!" he echoed, with a smile. "Then it does not surprise you *now*, quite as it would have done some time ago?"

"No."

"He is going away, Lina," her brother said, watching her anxiously as he spoke. "His mother has a small estate in Scotland, and he says he shall go there. It is a farm, smaller than many on the estate here, he says; but he shall find plenty to do; and he is going at once. He was making light of it all, but I don't know how far he meant it. I showed him the copy of our mother's marriage register, but he would not read it. He turned his eyes away, and then began to speak to me of you."

"Gerard dear, rest now," said Lina, tenderly laying her cool little hand upon his forehead; "you have talked so much. Let me read to you."

"Not quite yet; I want to tell you all before I rest. Sir Neil told me how long he had loved you, and how deeply; though you would never listen to him. He told me how wrong

he knew he had been in telling you of this love, while he was engaged to Miss Castillain, but how he had let it master him in his selfishness and idleness. He said that it would live through all his life, and that he should tell this at once to Miss Castillain; but that he should never mention it again to pain *you.* He knew himself unworthy of you—he had known it for long, he said—but his love had grown so strong within him, that he could not root it out now; and then, more earnestly than I had fancied he could ever speak, he begged me to persuade you to go home to High Athelston as its mistress, and to give his mother a home with you there. Lina, how strange it was to hear this from his lips, I cannot say. Dear, will you go?"

"Oh! Gerard, hush!—please, hush!" she entreated. "Let us be together."

"Sir Neil wants High Athelston to have its own mistress," he went on, as if by a great effort, "and to be ruled and governed only by her orders; and he will have the truth made known *at once;* though I pleaded that it should

lie with us at present, because I shall never have a claim to make, and you do not wish to make one—while I am—with you. I hope he will be persuaded by Colonel Stuart, as he will not listen to me. It will make little difference, after all, if your home is his mother's still—as it would naturally be—for he will all his life be the baronet, Lina."

"Oh, Gerard," she interrupted, the cry wrung from her in her sore fear and pain, "I cannot bear this! Oh, if God will only leave us together, or take us together! Gerard, I dare not lose you; do not talk of that time."

"Pet," he said, with a flash of the old brightness in his eyes, "I want you to give me one of the blocks from that drawer—a prepared one, and a well-pointed pencil. It is *so* long since my fingers have been at their old task, and just now I feel as if they had their old strength and power. May I try?"

She brought him the block and pencil, standing by in speechless hope to see him take them in his hands. A few nervous

strokes he drew; then, with a little laugh, he held the block more firmly, and bent above it, trying with intense care to make some of his old touches of delicate shadowing.

"No," he said, after a few minutes' effort, looking up into his sister's disappointed eyes; "no, the strokes will not come as I wish them. Look at these wild outlines."

"They remind me of our own Cornish cliffs," she said brokenly, crushing back her tears.

"Do they?" he asked, absently. "Lina, do you remember that last day in Cornwall—our birthday—when we went to the islands? And do you remember what Miss Castillain said of them on the day you found me by the mountain lake?"

"Yes, I remember it all," whispered Lina, "and the bright picture Colonel Stuart gave us afterwards. I remember that day so well, and how you worked among us while we idled there."

"Oh, Lina, if it had only been told me that day, as it was told to you, that, under the waters of that quiet little pool, there lurked a certain death!"

"Shall I put away the block?" she asked, gently turning that subject aside.

"Yes, I cannot do it, though I fancied so wildly that I could. Yes, take it, dear. It is not a very manly thing to own to, is it?—but I am tired, really tired. Lina, what is that hymn which tells us that the rest will be longer than the toil? Oh! such a recompence! Short toil—eternal rest. Can you sing it to me?"

While she sang, sweetly and softly, sitting beside him with his hand in hers, and her eyes turned from his patient, resting face, Neil Athelston walked rapidly to Hawkedale, and asked to see Marjorie. She should hear the truth at last from his own lips—the truth so long kept hidden in his cowardice.

Miss Marjorie was alone in the drawing-room. So the old servant said; and Neil,

with the privilege of her affianced husband, entered the room unannounced. Marjorie was writing at her desk, but when she saw him she rose with a smile.

"Neil!—how strange! I was just then writing to you."

Week after week, month after month, they had put off telling of the conviction which had been growing so strong within them; and now the reserve had broken for both on the same day. Without seeing a word of the letter, Neil knew what she had written; and before a word passed his lips, Marjorie knew what he had come to say. And they looked into each other's eyes, and at that moment understood each other, as they had never done through all the years that they had been betrothed.

"Marjorie, I think you know what I have come to say," he began, humbly; "you look as if you knew it, dear; but, in any case, I must tell you now. Marjorie, my faith and fealty to you have been, for a whole year, worthless—worthless as all belonging to me has been. I will not tell you how earnestly I

hope it will be different now; what right have I to believe that you care? I will not tell you that your own life will be happier spent apart from mine; what right have I to speak of that? I can only tell you the simple truth. I have let a new love fill my heart. I have learned now that the affection I offered you, was not what I thought it was, and what it ought to have been. Marjorie, you know who has worked this change in me. Lina—Athelston will never accept the love which I pressed upon her when I insulted her in every such word I uttered, but it must be hers always now; and—and knowing its strength within me, I know it is the only love which I can offer my wife."

"Yes, I know it too," said Marjorie, in her ready, genial tones, but with a gentle compassion in her eyes. "I am so glad you have told me this yourself, Neil; I have been long hoping you would do so. I knew what you had to tell, but I would not say it for you. I waited for you to tell it me yourself."

"And you saw how cowardly I was, in shrinking from this?"

"Yes, Neil," she answered, brightly; "and I was cowardly myself, too. How could I be sure that papa would not advertise, 'I do hereby give notice that I disown my daughter Marjorie, in consequence of her disobedience in the matter of taking a husband.' I saw just such an advertisement yesterday in an old register; and it sounded very like papa. Just think what my chances would have been after that! Neil, aren't you afraid of a similar act on the part of your mother? If Lady Athelston would only marry papa now, they might work out personally their own ends and aims! 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, don't you think?"

"It would hardly consummate their own ends, would it?" asked Neil, too really grave to enter into the spirit of her words, and too really fond of her to bear this separation lightly, as she seemed to do. "High Athelston was to be the gainer by *our* marriage, Marjorie; High Athelston and its master."

"Thank you, Neil," she answered, quietly;

"but our parents' schemes have gone *aglee*—as the best laid, will, you know, whether of mice or men,—or even women. Our loves were beyond their reach, little as they imagined it."

"Marjorie," said Neil, thinking it best to say as little as he could of either Mr. Castillain or Lady Athelston, while his thoughts were so sore, "it is sorrowful work saying good-bye to you."

"Where are you going, Neil?"

She asked it anxiously, but with very little surprise. She knew that he was not even now the real master of High Athelston, and she could sympathise with his crushed ambition, as well as with his hopeless love.

"To Scotland, Marjorie. Where else could I go? What other home have I a right to claim?"

"I hope it is not to be a very long good-bye," she said, with a smile, as she gave him her hand. "I shall miss you greatly; we are such old friends, are not we? Don't stay away from us all very long. Neil," the young voice

which had struggled to be cheery grew low and sad again, "have you seen Lina and her brother to-day?"

"Yes, I saw her for a moment; she soon went away, as she always does from me. He sent for me, and I was with him while he told me—all that he had to tell," he added, hurriedly.

"It is sad to see him, is not it?" asked Marjorie, showing in her face how well she understood what this *all* was. "He used to look so strong and stalwart; one cannot help thinking what a long course of hard work and self-denial it must have been which has brought him to this; and one cannot help fretting over it. Yet he does not, he seems as brave and ready to meet death, Neil, as he was brave and ready to meet the trials of his life."

"Colonel Stuart was going back to him when I came away, Marjorie," he said, avoiding a direct answer to her words; "I am glad he is so true a friend to them both. It struck me from the first as such a characteristic of Stuart that he should be the one to have helped—" not yet could he bring himself to utter Gerard's

name naturally enough to venture it to Marjorie, "to have helped in the gathering of that sum which was to have repaid the imaginary debt to old Mr. Esdaile."

"Yes, just characteristic of him," replied Marjorie, with a wonderful, quiet gladness in her eyes.

Then they bade good-bye; a good-bye the memory of which was pleasant to them both through all the after-years. And Neil fancied, as he walked slowly back on the familiar way, that if Sir Gerard Athelston's son had inherited his rightful name and home, the fulfilment of old Mr. Castillain's pet scheme would have been easier to Marjorie.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GATE OF TEARS.

THE greater part of each day was spent by Marjorie Castillain, and Colonel Stuart or Mrs. Esdaile, at the cottage in Nether Lane. No one else could share Lina's grief; at the coming of no one else did Gerard's face brighten as it brightened at the coming of these friends who had been his friends through all. Still they knew that there were hours and hours when he would be happier alone with his sister, and then they never intruded into the silent room. Sometimes, for a whole morning, Marjorie would sit downstairs talking to, or quietly helping, Mrs. Cheere (who took the work of the house, as well as the work of the

hired nurse, upon herself, and, both mentally and bodily, "went softly"); and then would walk homewards, only having left a silent kiss on Lina's lips, and a whispered word or two for Gerard. But there were other times, when she would linger in his room for hours, with that bright sense of ease which peculiarly belonged to Marjorie, and made her seem at home wherever she might be.

It was on the last morning in May that Colonel Stuart, buried in anxious thought, walked alone to the cottage. He had spent most of the previous night beside Gerard's bed, and he knew that the end was drawing near. It would be a calm and peaceful end; but none the less sad for those who witnessed it, and who knew what the solitude afterwards would be for the twin-sister.

So Colonel Stuart was thinking, when he reached the cottage door, and looked down upon a pitiful little object. Jet, with his head held tightly in his hands, was sobbing without a sound, while his whole frame shook and trembled in the emotion which was unchildlike in its intensity.

Colonel Stuart, with his arm about the shaking little form, was whispering his few cheering words of comfort, when Lady Athelston came through the cottage door, her face unusually pale, and with the mark of tears still on it. He turned to walk with her down the garden; then, in his quiet soothing way, he asked for Neil.

"He is gone," she answered, understanding this question, as he knew she would, from the motion of his lips, "and I am desolate without him. But Miss Chester is coming back—some day—when—Oh! I have felt so miserable in there. He ought to be at High Athelston. If he is to die, he should die at High Athelston! Should not it be so, Alick?"

"It matters little," he answered, with a smile she could understand, whether she guessed rightly at the words or not.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you will not go up to him? He has been disturbed much to-day; and is very tired, Marjorie says. She herself is waiting downstairs. See! she is sitting at the window there, and will not go up unless she is called."

"I understand," he said. "I will walk a little way with you, Lady Athelston."

Whether she heard his answer or not, she was glad to take his offered arm; for the tears and distress of this morning had left her weaker even than usual, and, with a feeling of unwonted delicacy, she had come alone.

Even when he returned, after leaving her at the entrance to the park, Colonel Stuart saw that Marjorie still sat beside the window; but her head was not bent now, it was raised as if she listened to some sound far off. So he paused a minute at the gate, looking thoughtfully away among the shadows of the overarching elm-boughs, and just then Dorcas came from the cottage behind him, and throwing her arms about the sorrowing child, she took him tenderly into her own home, and closed the door upon their weeping.

Upstairs, in the room where Gerard lay, the silence had been the hush of peace, and not despair. Lina's eyes, as she sat beside him, were fixed upon his face with a yearning that was unutterably sad in its intensity; but his were far away

just then, out among the sunlit leaves and pure white clouds; and the yearning that was in *them*, had no sadness in it.

They were both silent, as they were so often now, in that hushed, expectant silence in which the living and the dying feel so keenly the great gulf between them, yet feel so mercifully the one Hope which spans this gulf.

It was Gerard who broke the silence at last, speaking softly, as his eyes came back from their long gaze, and rested on the pale and wistful face beside him.

"Lina, I am so glad, so very glad that you have consented to go back—I mean to go home—to High Athelston."

"You asked me, Gerard," she said, wearily; "can I do anything but what you wish?"

"Lady Athelston is really fond of you, my pet," he went on, seeking for all the comfort that the thought could give them, "really fond of you; and I can see a happy life in store for you—a happy life such as you have never known, my little sister."

She tried to answer brightly the tender questioning of his eyes, but she could not.

"Lina," he said, presently, "I want—I want you to give me my Order of License; my-ticket-of-leave, I mean, dear. It is always in a hidden pocket of my coat. I had to carry it about with me, and I always made the pocket myself; such a cheery task, Lina."

One passionate, grievous sob burst impetuously from the girl's heart, as she rose and looked where he bade her. Never had she seen the paper she sought; and now, of all times, how could she bear to look upon it? Tightly she clasped her fingers round the folded sheet and brought it to him with her face averted.

"Even now, can it give you pain to look upon it?" he asked, with a smile which showed how little pain it could give him. "Why, Lina, if it had not been given me, where should I have been now? Not here with you, my darling. Eight years, this order says, and not six of them have passed yet. I should have been there still, but for this paper which you will not look upon. Yet even I, Lina, until to-day, have not dared to open it since it was given me. I felt that if I saw the words before my eyes, I must

tear them into atoms. But now it is different. I think I could read them now."

He held the paper open in his hands, and tried to follow the words. Lina had buried her face upon the bed, and did not see how the effort failed.

"The lines swim before me," he said, shading his eyes with one hand. "What is it, Lina? *Her Majesty is graciously pleased to grant to Gerard Dymocke, who was convicted of Forgery at the*——No, I cannot read that; for it brings back, even yet, the isolation, and the constant weariness, and, above all, the terrible degradation. But what is this, Lina, above the seal? *And Her Majesty hereby orders that the said Gerard Dymocke be set at liberty within thirty days from the date of this order.* How well I remember those thirty days, Lina! The man who worked next me had no such liberation to look forward to; and so I used——"

"Oh! hush, hush," cried Lina, raising her anguished face, and passionately crushing the parchment under her fingers, "Oh! Gerard, I dare not remember that time—to-day."

"For me," said Gerard, softly, "it should be good to remember it to-day. The liberty was given me for—" he broke off suddenly, seeing her piteous suffering. "Lina, I will think of it no more. Will you burn that for me? I need it no longer. Let me see you destroy it."

And she burned it; standing to watch it consume because he watched it, though she did so in a passion of weeping which she tried in vain to suppress.

"My dear, my dear, the greatest grief through all was, that *you* should have to bear the dishonour I had brought on this name of ours; and that you must fight alone that battle of life which I once felt so strong to fight for you. Oh! Lina, what a shattered plan mine is; but, darling, even of these fragments One Hand can make a perfect plan at last; and *you* will do the work for which I was not worthy."

"Gerard, Gerard, I cannot bear it! Oh, my brother, talk of other things."

A little silent pause, while her face was hidden on his wasted hands; then he spoke with his old brightness, only the tones were so low and weak:

"Lina, do you remember the first time I took you out to sea alone, and how I could not frighten you?"

"You never could frighten me, Gerard."

Not a word more of the separation that was coming; not a word more of the life she was to live without him; only loving, cheery memories now of that life which they had spent together long ago, before the clouds had gathered about them. And the anguished weeping ceased at last, and the girl's eyes (brave in their grief) could look again, without their blinding tears, into the patient ones upon the pillows.

Higher and higher rose the sun, in all the brilliance of its morning strength.

"Lina, I want to see Jet once more."

"He is here, dear Gerard; I will fetch him, if you are not too tired now."

"Not—not too tired."

Jet came in, treading softly, and with his small hands tightly locked before him, in the determination to hold back his tears, at cost of any struggle. And then the young man and the child looked into each other's eyes, until there grew

there, the old, quiet light of laughter which had been so familiar in the busy days which they had spent together in these little rooms.

"Laddie," said Gerard, presently, with a beautiful, tender smile, which the child never could forget through all his life, and kissing the sorrowful little face as men but rarely kiss, "don't forget me. Try not ever *quite* to forget me, and some day we shall find each other again—and know each other, I hope—in our Father's home. Good-bye, laddie; kiss me once again—the last of the kisses that used to be so pleasant to me."

And still the child could keep back his tears, while he stood there, knowing he looked his last upon the man who had taken him generously into his warm heart, when there was no one else in all the world to do so; but Gerard heard the sobs burst forth beyond restraint when Lina led the boy tenderly away.

The sun rose higher still, strong and untiring in its course, and the bright Spring day was nearly in the zenith of its beauty.

"Lina," said Gerard, as he lay looking out into the far, calm blue beyond the floating

clouds, "long ago, in those weary days among the convicts, I used to get weak and tired sometimes at nights—not often, dear, but sometimes; so exhausted that I used to fancy the possibility of dying there, and—to fear it, Lina. I feared the agony of death itself; I feared the—the judgment afterwards; fancying God's verdict might be what man's had been. Now all fear is gone. I know how He who is the highest in judgment, does not judge us as we judge each other. So I have no fear, my darling, only peace. Is not this knowledge worth the pain which taught it me, dear little sister—the pain which is not great for me to-day?"

But she could not answer the words, whose truth was so intense, even while they were uttered in physical pain.

"I will not ask you to read again," he said, touching the Book which lay upon the bed, and looking sadly into her wide and pitiful eyes; "but will you sing to me? I love to hear your voice, my darling. Sing of the Kindly Light."

The last notes died softly in the hush, and

Gerard's thoughts seemed far away—as far, perhaps, as where was breaking, even now, that morn of which she had been telling.

"Lina," he said presently, turning to her with his own bright smile, "you remember how we sang together, in the old days when we fancied we were very lonely children—lonely with each other! Oh, how often have some of the words come back to me in your own dear voice. I should like to sing with you once again if I can. Will you begin, darling? You know the hymn you spoke of last night."

Gazing out among the sunny leaves, because she could not trust herself to look into his face now, Lina sang—

> "Art thou weary, art thou languid,
> Art thou sore distressed?"

And he, his white lips weak and tremulous, took up the words and notes, and softly sang the answer.

> "Come to me, saith One, and, coming,
> Be at rest."

Through each verse those answering lines grew fainter and fainter, while Lina's sweet tones struggled through her tears.

"If I find Him, if I follow
What His guerdon here?"

A very whisper now, was the answer from the sinking voice,

"Many a sorrow, many a labour,
Many a tear."

Softly Lina's question followed:

"If I still hold closely to Him
What hath He at last?"
"Sorrow vanquished, labour—ended——"

Lina, in a very passion of weeping, hid her face upon the bed now, for the dying voice had ceased.

The sun had risen to its mid-day height, and was shining in its fullest splendour, and in the meridian of its strength and power. Both Gerard's weak hands were clasped in Lina's, and she spoke to him softly and wistfully, as if, in the hush of the angel's presence, she could detain him by her clinging, sorrowing love. And he looked into her face with a light in his eyes more beautiful than any smile, but he could not speak, for his breath was slow and failing now.

And then, as she looked, she fancied that her kneeling figure and her yearning face were drifting from him slowly, slowly; that the room was widening for him into infinite space. And then the angel stood between them.

All over now, and there was rest unspeakable for Gerard. Only twenty-eight! But there are many men who tell their four-score years, and yet live less than he. Only twenty-eight! But He who closed the tired eyes before the sun began to sink, knew how the burden and heat of the day had been borne.

CHAPTER XIV.

WANTED, NEXT OF KIN.

"NEXT-OF-KIN.—JELFREY. The next of kin of Eustace Jelfrey, who died in Africa, are requested to communicate with Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

That was the advertisement which attracted the attention of both Colonel Stuart and Marjorie Castillain, on the very morning of Gerald's death, neither of whom, however, broke in upon Lina's solitary grief to show it to her.

By the same day's post, the Colonel wrote to Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, describing Jet's relationship to Eustace Jelfrey, asking for further particulars, and enclosing the address of his own solicitors. The reply was to the

effect that the particulars which Colonel Stuart had kindly furnished had been forwarded by Messrs. Beard and Cartwright to their client, whose further commands they awaited.

"We will not show it to Lina, nor tell her we have written, until a further answer comes, Marjorie," Mrs. Esdaile said; "only you and I and Alick know, and we may save her disappointment."

On the very day after Gerard's funeral, Lina started for Cornwall, and Mrs. Cheere and Jet accompanied her. She was very glad of this. She was not yet strong enough to bear the responsibility, as well as the fatigue, of travelling; and it was much better for her to have the care and attention of the woman who had grown to love her for her brother's sake, than that of a maid. As for the child, she was glad indeed to have him with her, for she loved him for her brother's sake, and she longed for her grandfather to know Gerard's boy. So the thoughtful plan, concocted between Marjorie and Dorcas, succeeded admirably; and the fatigue of the journey, as well as the duties which

awaited her at Tresean, were lightened wonderfully by Mrs. Cheere. They were lightened even by Jet, too, for the teaching of childhood had fitted him well for such tasks as he now loved to perform for Lina and her sick grandfather.

More than three weeks Hiram Dymocke lived, through Lina's ever-watchful, ever-tender nursing; then he died peacefully, with his wife's name upon his lips, and the hand of his daughter's child in his. And when the old man's will was read, it was found that, at the earnest desire of his grand-daughter, he had left all which by right she should have inherited, to the adopted child of his late grandson, to be invested, for him, as his guardians approved, but not used till he came of age. Then a grave in the churchyard (far removed from that one beneath the wall, which was no longer nameless) was closed for the last time, and Hiram Dymocke lay beside his wife; the clouds and suspicions which had separated them for years, all scattered and melted now.

On their return to Highshire, Mrs. Cheere and

Jet settled quietly down again in the white cottage in Nether Lane, and Lina took up her abode with Lady Athelston at High Athelston. It cost her a great struggle to do this, because she knew her presence would keep the mother and son apart; still she could not forget that she had promised Lady Athelston, in Gerard's presence, nor could she pretend to be ignorant that it would be a relief to Neil's mother to have her to depend upon once more; nor how she, too, longed in her loneliness to be near those few true, tried friends, who had been so kind to her and to Gerard.

So she went, and the weeks passed on until the Autumn time, bringing no changes but those subtle ones which we pass by almost unnoticed. Lina was indeed like a daughter to Lady Athelston, giving her a daughter's care, almost a daughter's love, and quite a daughter's obedience. No one knew what useless, though pleasantly-sustained, frauds were her grave consultations with Lady Athelston, when any plans were mooted for the estates or tenantry; and those pet speeches of the little real mistress of the house.

"I will ask Lady Athelston what she will wish done;" "I will speak to your mistress, and let you know what she decides." No one knew what hollow little fictions were those orders which she represented as Sir Neil's, when the agents told her he refused to give any directions by letter, and always referred them to her. No one, on all the estate, knew what an absolute little mistress Lina was made to be, even while she gave these commands which purported to be Sir Neil's or Lady Athelston's; nor was anyone ever allowed to see Lady Athelston's utter dependance upon her. With noble, womanly, delicate tact, Lina hid this, while she did, most anxiously, all she could do in her new and trying position.

It was not often that Sir Neil wrote to her—rarely, except in answer to those letters which asked for his wishes in certain matters—but when he did, he could make his letters pleasant to her; and he never let them speak one word of love, or of disappointment, or of dissatisfaction for his isolated life. They were always simple and manly, but nothing more; for Neil

had never possessed Gerard's hopefulness and bright content.

Colonel Stuart had, two or three times, been to see him in Scotland, and had always brought back a cheery description of his farm and his busy life.

"It is a model farm, even for Scotland," he used to say; "and Neil is always doing something; not that Neil, even yet, knows very much about it all; but he is steadily determined to learn, and he does not shun work. It is more praise, too, than you can imagine it to be, when his bailiff (himself an educated fellow, and an experienced farmer) pronounces him improving."

"Poor Neil!"

"Not poor," the Colonel would answer, smiling at Marjorie's pet term; "there is no *poor* look about him. He looks twice as well—and as handsome, too—as he used to look lounging in the billiard-room and drawing-rooms at High Athelston; and if his hands are not so white and soft as when he drove his favourites in Hyde Park, I can tell you they have gained in strength and skill."

Marjorie's letters to Neil were more frequent than Lina's, and longer by far. She loved to send him droll pictures of old familiar places and people; comical incidents of her own home life; long, chatty accounts of life at High Athelston, and every little bit of news she could gather. So well she knew what a trial was this new life for him, after the gaiety, and splendour, and adulation of his whole past existence! So well she understood how hungry he would be for home news now! But, amusing as her letters were, they always helped him, too; strengthening him, and cheering him, as well as giving him just that relief of hope which they were intended to give. And when he told her so, and thanked her, he pleased her as no words of his had ever pleased her in the old days of their betrothal.

It was to him that Marjorie was writing on a certain Autumn day, when Lina entered the library and sat down to rest beside the fire. Marjorie was staying at High Athelston, as she often stayed even now, for Lady Athelston and Lina both loved to have her there, and knew, too, that her own home was even less bright

for her than it used to be. Before she finished her letter, she turned and spoke to Lina.

"Any message for Neil?"

"I was just thinking of him," the girl answered, simply; "I suppose because I guessed to whom you were writing; or—perhaps because his mother has been talking of him, and wanting him."

"It would be so much better for him to come home, wouldn't it?" asked Marjorie, waiting eagerly for the reply.

"I don't know. He knows best."

"Do you tell him how his mother frets for him, Lina, and how her strength fails?"

"Yes, when I write."

"I suppose, then," returned Marjorie, with a little sigh, "that he is too busy to come. Colonel Stuart says he is always busy. Busy!—I cannot tack the word to Neil in my mind even yet. Colonel Stuart is going to Scotland to-night."

"Why?" asked Lina, involuntarily.

"I do not know," was the slow answer; "unless he goes to see Neil. He would hardly start off on a couple of days' visit to that distance to

anyone else, would he? Yet I don't know, he has so many friends and fellow-officers scattered over the kingdom. I am glad he is going away for a little, because he seems to be growing so quiet here. He has not cared to join in our petty gaieties lately, as he always used to do."

"Yet he is just the same," returned Lina, earnestly, "kind and good and helpful to all."

"Yes; he could not be otherwise. Why, he makes even Hawkedale pleasant when he is there; and it is not, you are well aware, a naturally pleasant place, less so than ever now. Papa still refuses to believe that my engagement with Neil is cancelled, and insists on talking of it, on purpose to prevent the possibility of anyone imagining it over. And he *makes* me listen to him until I burn with shame. Oh, Lina, it is so bitterly humiliating; and there is nothing in life to make up for it. Even you, my lonely child, are scarcely so unutterably lonely as I am. You are of use, and you are loved, although you have no relations. I am neither, though I have father and sister.

But you are good; *that* must make all the difference."

Such a speech from Marjorie struck Lina as sadly as desponding words always do strike us from lips that are used to fun and laughter.

"I wish sometimes," continued Marjorie, very low, "that they would drift away—all the wearisome things around me, all the wearisome tasks before me—that it would all be over, Lina."

"Oh, Marjorie, I am so grieved to see you sad," she whispered, lovingly. "This mood is so unlike you."

"Unlike! Why? Because I am one of those thoughtless girls who never seem to know what gloom is?" asked Marjorie, with a quick laugh. "Why, we are just the very ones who suffer most from this dismal mood—what shall I call it—re-action? Just the very ones to suffer most heavily and despondently, when we do suffer from it at all. But it will soon pass with me; for it had no business to come; and I am not, even yet, quite the one to nurse such a feeling, though it may master me for the time. I shall——ah, Lina, you are sent for.

Lady Athelston has not given you a long recess, has she? While you are away, I will finish my letter; then, if you are not here, I will come to you."

But Marjorie seemed in no hurry to finish the letter. Left alone, she leaned her head on her hands and let her thoughts have their own way. Sad enough these thoughts were, as minute after minute she sat there, alone and listless.

"I will try, I will try to be better," she whispered to herself at last, raising her head and pushing the hair from her temples; "I will try, and then I shall be happy—at least I suppose so. Louie will be married soon, and then perhaps papa will be kinder to me, as I shall be the only daughter he will have with him. Poor Louie!" sighed the girl, with a look of real pity in her eyes; "I would rather, ten hundred times, live alone with papa at Hawkedale, than marry such a poor little vain nonentity as Lord Lythwood. Poor Louie! But—but how sad it has been ever since Gerard Athelston's death!"

"Colonel Stuart."

He came forward, with his easy at-homeness, as Martin closed the door upon him; but Marjorie felt the colour rise in her face as it had never done before at his approach—almost as if she had been detected in wanting him.

"I am going to Scotland, Miss Marjorie," he said, standing at the fire, with his back to the desk on which her unfinished letter lay, "and I want to know if you have any message to entrust to me for Neil. I am going to try to bring him home with me."

Frankly the girl met the searching glance bent upon her.

"I do not think he will come," she answered, simply.

"May I not take him what he is waiting for, Miss Marjorie—the assurance of your wish to see him?"

"Mine?" she echoed, the ready colour rising once again, and her eyes drooping, with a rare shyness, beneath his questioning gaze. "You are—mistaken; he does not wait for mine, Colonel Stuart. Neil Athelston and I have broken that long engagement of ours."

"But—but your father says that report is false."

"Yes, I know he does," replied Marjorie, quietly. "It is his pleasure to say it, and insist on it; but that can never piece the broken thread again. Have you known the Squire so long, Colonel Stuart, to be now surprised by his insisting that I have no mind of my own."

There was a laugh upon her lips, though a tremulous one; but his were very grave indeed, and his eyes intent upon her as he spoke again.

"Miss Marjorie, have I been wrong in my fancy all this while, that Neil's loss of wealth could make no difference in *your* love for him?"

"Such a fancy, whether it has been yours or not, could not be wrong," she answered, quietly. "No loss of wealth could have made *any* difference in my love for him, if love had been really love on either side. But it was not. Can you understand? The knowledge of this has been slow in asserting itself to either of us, but it has been almost always there. It would have been

told nearly two years ago, only that we were both cowards."

Because he did not answer those earnest words, she looked with surprise into his face.

"Colonel Stuart, you don't rebuke me as you always used to do, and I cannot recognize you so. Please to scold me, and have it over."

"I cannot," he answered, gently. "Even in old times it was very hard, but now it seems impossible. Marjorie, you will never understand what made me often seem so hard and stern to you. Your words and acts were always more to me than those of anyone else in the world, and this I was obliged to hide. I had the grief of seeing you behave to everyone with more gentleness than to me, yet I dared not show the pain this gave me. I fancied that I understood better than anyone the many sterling qualities which you so often either hid or marred, and—I loved you for them with all my heart and soul. Yet I never dared encourage this thought, or love—knowing that you were promised to Neil."

"I never could have married Neil," said Mar-

jorie, in a tremulous whisper, as the shy, brilliant colour burned in her cheeks, "even though I had promised."

"I have listened while you spoke to those you loved, as you *could* speak, Marjorie, with all your kind heart in your voice and eyes, and I have tried to fancy what it would be to *me* to listen to such words from you; but—as you know—you were always different to me."

"Always," faltered Marjorie, with sad gravity; "but if you know the reason of your own sternness, can you not guess the reason of my defiance? It was a poor weak armour, after all."

"Marjorie! Marjorie!" he cried, with a wonderful new brightness on his face, "is this possible? Oh! my love, don't jest with me in this. I am too old a man to bear such a disappointment as you may be giving me now."

"However much I jested when you tried to teach me," she said, raising her eyes, in which the unshed tears were glistening, "I always tried to obey you in the end—because—I loved you."

"But, Marjorie,"—and the rare, slow tears of happiness were standing in *his* eyes, too, as he looked with questioning fear into her face—"but, Marjorie, have you thought of this in any light but that of your own fearless generosity? Could you be happy with me, a comparatively old man, almost twenty years your senior?"

"Have *you* thought?" she answered, gently. "Could you be happy with a girl who all her life long has been vexing and hurting you; who has never been made a companion of by anyone; who always frets and repines if things don't go quite smoothly; who was in the very act of fretting and repining when you came in?"

"My love," he said, and drew her close within his arms, "you fretful! you repining!—my bright, brave girl! I feel now that we can never have really misunderstood each other for one moment, because we are so close together now. Ah, Marjorie, I never guessed of this happiness in store for me. How could I? How dare I?"

"Because you are so old?" she questioned, the old gentle tremulous drollery on her lips.

"Well, let us say I have a smack of age in me, like Falstaff," he said laughing; "but I was not thinking then of that."

"You had forgotten it for one moment?" she asked, more earnestness than laughter on her bright, sweet face. "Then do not think of any other—grievance. I knew always," she went on, softly, "that you saw my faults more clearly than any one else saw them; and so how can I feel that this is true? Can you really love me as I am?"

"Dearly, dearly, my precious one. I loved you always, even as you were in your most random, and, to me, unkind moods. I could not help it, hard as I tried and tried. I could not help it."

"Colonel Stu——"

"Colonel?" he echoed, laughing, as he gazed with ineffable tenderness far down into her shy eyes. "Is that my name for you, Marjorie?"

"Alick," the word came very timidly from her lips, but very tenderly withal, "Alick, will you—what are those words?—will you

'be to my virtues very kind, be to my faults a little blind?' But you always are, with every one, and so I think the faults will be fewer. Those bad, mutinous thoughts, which used to come when you were near me—because I felt so very far away—can never come again."

"Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, after a pause, "I wish I were taking to Neil, just such a happiness as I have now in my own heart."

"We must wait," she answered, wistfully; "I do believe it will come—I do indeed. And these waiting months are not wasted for him, are they?"

"Indeed they are not."

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

AS Christmas drew near, Lady Athelston, though not, perhaps, weaker than she had been through the Autumn, grew more despondent about herself, and more fretful over her son's continued absence, considering it a kind of melancholy duty to insist on others sharing as much as possible in her own querulous gloom, whenever Lina's bright and cheering care would allow her to do so. And the girl, in the anxiety of her ever-wakeful grief, tried and tried in vain to see how it would be wisest for her to act; knowing all the time that only her own heart could counsel her—a poor counsellor ever, when duty, and pride, and inclination, all pull different ways.

Hour after hour, in those long Winter evenings, while Lady Athelston dozed upon her couch, Lina would sit before the fire, in solitary thought, wondering and wondering what it would be right for her to do.

If only some voice would whisper to her distinctly what was best, she would sigh. If only some mark would lie upon the way she ought to take, so that this anxious doubt might be at rest. But no voice could be heard, and no mark seen; and it was all left to her own heart, as she said sadly to herself, while her beautiful, anxious eyes sought vainly, in the dim, red aisles among the glowing coals, for that answer which could be neither heard nor seen.

And then Neil's mother would awake repining; (as inherently selfish people generally do), and would wonder fretfully why Lina's letters failed to bring Neil home.

"You must write again, Lina. Why will you not insist on his coming? If you had given my messages, I am sure he would have been here; unless,"—with a quick, questioning glance into the grave face—"unless you told him you

would go away from here if he came. You know I could not spare *you*, and it is very cruel of you to propose it. I cannot spare you, but I want Neil too. Oh, Lina, bring him home, and do not go away yourself. If you do, I shall die, with no one to understand me or help me—still I want my boy."

And Lina could only turn the subject gently aside, and lead the mother's thoughts where she delighted for them to revel, until she again forgot all but the simple, easy happiness which the girl's love and care had given her, and the relief it was to have such a bright, unselfish little companion about the great, quiet house.

But the strain it was upon Lina, so to hide the anxiety which weighed upon her day and night, told gradually upon her. And now that Christmas was near, she looked as pale and harassed as she had looked in that illness of hers in the early Spring.

Once—after a tiresome day, only brightened by a long quiet talk with Marjorie Castillain, which left its influence strong and clear behind—in among her puzzled thoughts there

came a sudden, rapid decision, as such decisions sometimes will rush in, to end those doubts which trouble us long and incomprehensibly. She rose from her spell of wondering thought, and began at once to write to Sir Neil. She would not wait to allow the old hesitation a moment's time to creep in. She would write without one more doubt. Lady Athelston's tearful entreaties were still in her ears; Marjorie's mute question lingered in her memory, and while she remembered these she would write. Not one of those arguments which her own heart had urged, as she sat thinking and thinking before the fire in the silent room, should make itself heard again. "Not one," she repeated, wearily, as she took up her pen.

Very few words, and very simple ones, she wrote to Neil. His mother longed for him to be with her through the Christmas time, she said, and yet did not like to spare her. So (the pen lingered here, but the trembling little hand led it briskly on) would he come and spend it with them both? He had said he would not come

until she asked him, and so now she asked him. Would he come?"

It was such a short and simple letter to cause any quickened heart-beats! Lina sent it in haste to the post-bag. How could she ever let it go, if she kept it long enough to think the old thought even once more?

After that, it seemed as if the whole household was in a state of expectation through every hour of every day. Once at least every five minutes, Neil's mother started, and said she heard him; while she could not, poor lady, even hear the wild December wind.

It was on the wildest night of all the week,—while they sat in the luxurious warmth of the brilliant drawing-rooms, where Lady Athelston would always sit now in state, awaiting him,—that he came. Among the angry voices of the wind and rain, neither the carriage wheels nor the hurrying footsteps were heard. So they did not know he had arrived, until he came in to them, tall, and grand, and handsome, as of old; yet where of old there had been only leisurely, indolent grace, there was a firm and steadfast

quietness now, which altered him wonderfully.

His mother started from her couch, and Lina rose to meet him, for he must pass her first. A longing, intent look he gave into her face as he held her hand one minute in his clasp; then he passed on for his mother's rapturous welcome; and when he turned again the girl was gone. For the hour before dinner, the mother and son sat alone, and Lina only joined them again when the meal was announced.

There had not been such a merry dinner at High Athelston for months as this was, though Marjorie was not there. Martin, stepping noiselessly about the room, marvelled over the change in his master. The twin canaries, with one eye always on each other's deportment, opened the other to the widest extent, and gathered an unusual amount of anecdote to retail. Lina looked into Lady Athelston's beaming face and said to herself, Yes, it was best that she had written to Neil that letter which had brought him home. Then she, too, went back to wonder at the change in him, though it seemed slighter to her than to anyone, because she had guessed

it from his letters. But though her beautiful, dark eyes had a look of relief in them now that he was come, they never once met his with just that frank, proud gaze which had so firmly kept back hope from his heart, in the old time.

"Take my arm, mother; you have been so long without any temptation to lean upon me, that I want you to learn the lesson at once."

He had risen from the table as Lady Athelston did so, having evidently no intention of being left behind.

"But I am going to my own room now, dear; I must go, even though you are here," she said, deprecatingly. "Don't you hasten away with us, Neil. It is rather solitary for you; I wish I had invited Alick Stuart."

"I don't want Stuart," Neil said, gaily, as he led his mother from the dining-room. "I want only what this house contains."

As they passed slowly up the lighted staircase, Neil paused with a momentary hesitation before one of the portraits of Sir Gerard Athelston, and looked from it over his shoulder, for Lina loitered behind them. The vague, un-

acknowledged resemblance was all explained to him now.

He lingered in his mother's dressing-room until she would let him stay no longer; then he went back to the drawing-room, and waited for Lina. "Surely she will come back, if only to say good night to me," he thought, walking to and fro upon the velvet carpet.

But she never came. Neil's eyes seemed fastened to the door, which he had purposely left open, but no girlish figure passed it. One of the Canaries brought in the tea, and Martin hovered about it in his grave curiosity. Neil caught eagerly at this straw of an idea.

"Tea, eh, Martin?" he said, in actual dread of how much of his thoughts the old butler could guess. "I will go and tell the ladies."

Of course Martin's countenance was unmoved as usual, but there was something very like a smile in his sensations.

"I will find her," thought Neil, with a kind of apologetic excuse for himself, "and tell her Martin is waiting for her to come to tea."

Not with his mother, who was placidly enjoying her beauty sleep; not gone to her own room, as Margaret said when he met and questioned her; not in the library, where two great fires were having the Christmas laugh and conversation all to themselves; not in—— A sudden thought struck Neil; he had not yet been into the blue morning-room, where she had been fond of sitting, as he well remembered, in old times. Surely she would be there.

Without waiting to know whether his quiet rap had been heard, he entered. No lamps were lighted here, but the fire shed a soft gold light upon the dainty blue furniture, and upon a solitary little figure in black, lying with dreamy stillness in a wide arm-chair.

For a few moments Neil stood unseen, gazing, with all his heart in his eyes, at the beautiful, grave figure, wrapped and fondled in the rich, caressing light. Then he came forward, as grave as she, his blue eyes full of earnest love and untold longing.

He did not take a seat beside her, but stood opposite, against the low chimney-piece. Then

he made his prepared and commonplace little speech, but he looked at her with as great a reverence as if the black-robed girl had been his queen, and the blue silk chair the very throne of England.

"Martin is hovering about the drawing-room with tea, Miss Athelston."

"I have taken tea," she answered, glancing at him, with almost a startled glance. "I took it with Lady Athelston in her own room. I generally do."

"Then it may go," said Neil, quietly.

A little pause then; the girl leaning forward in her big arm-chair, with the intense stillness which, in her, was always begotten of any nervous dread or anxiety; the young man standing before her, big and tall and strong above his fellows, yet with his heart beating, and his lips shaking, like a woman's, because he felt that he was near her once again, and free to love her and to offer her his love. It was no insult *now* to lay at her feet the heart in which she had reigned alone so long

He broke the silence presently.

"I have not yet thanked you for your letter. You can never even dream what joy it was to me to receive your summons home—I mean here."

"No—home," said Lina, only because he paused and waited for her words.

"Still less can you dream what joy it is to me to be here. How long may I stay?"

She looked up at him again with the startled gaze.

"You—you will know," she said, softly. "As long, I hope, as your mother wishes."

"Lina, you will forgive me that I do not speak as wiser men would do at such a time. From the first, dear, my love has been a cause of suffering to myself, and to you; so I can hardly trust myself to look it in the face calmly, as other men might, and to tell you of it by degrees. I can only stay here, Lina, as—your husband. May I stay?"

The unusual quietness of his voice struck Lina oddly, while his face was white and trembling in the passion of his love.

"Sir Neil," she said, gently, as she rose in

her desire to reach the door, "stay with your mother."

"And with you?"

The answer she had striven to evade, was waited for with breathless eagerness. She smiled, a little nervous smile which rippled oddly on her lips, while her eyes were grave and serious.

"And with you, Lina?"

The question was repeated with a still greater eagerness, and the answer still more anxiously waited for.

It came in the softest whisper. "Yes."

"With you?—with you, Lina?—with my wife?" The questions rushed from his lips brokenly, in his joy. "Oh! my beloved, is it to be so?—will you be happy so?—for, immense as my love is, it shall not bring you misery again. My own love—my own and only love—can you be happy as my wife—my treasured, cherished wife? Can you? Just whisper it, as you whispered that other precious 'yes.'"

And she whispered it.

Closely and tightly he held her in his arms, with a protecting, fostering love; but the look of reverence still shone deep down in his blue eyes, as he drank his happiness thirstily from the pure and truthful depths of hers.

"My little treasure, won at last!" he murmured. "My priceless treasure! What a future you have given me, Lina! Without you, all my years would have been aimless, as were those years before I knew you. With you, it will be all different. Such a life mine may be now, perhaps, Lina, as the real master of High Athelston would have lived here."

These words she could not answer. Her grief had been too deep and solitary a one, to have it brought back to her, even yet, by the words of others.

"I think of him often," the young man went on, gravely, "and I am always the better and the stronger for such thought. Now we can talk together how he would have acted, and I know I shall make a better master, a better friend, a better man altogether, for trying to do as he would have done. You are stronger,

my love—you are stronger and better, are you not?" he broke off, raising her drooping face, and gazing into it with untold fondness; "and your life shall be easy and restful now, as it has never been. Lina, Lina,"—in a whisper of happy emotion—"look up and meet my eyes just once, and say you love me. No, that is too much for me to ask; look up and meet my eyes just once, and tell me that I may stay with you for always."

She looked up slowly, her eyes most beautiful in their perfect trust, and she answered him in clear, soft, happy tones,

"Neil, I want you to stay with me always."

Then with what deep and passionate gratitude did he hold her to his heart, while his lips clave to hers in their first kiss.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THE fire and lamp were burning brightly in Mrs. Cheere's little parlour, and at the table sat Jet, making, in his drawing-book, a rather distorted copy of one of the illustrations in Colonel Stuart's lately-published work on Highshire—the one book which Dorcas prized; which she was among the first to buy (though such an expensive literary treasure she had never dreamed before of purchasing), and which was even already beginning to look worn and damaged from the contact of the untiring fingers which turned the pictured leaves.

Jet was stooping very much, and his brows were knitted; but even with those advantages

he could not, as it seemed, obtain an artistic effect, for his rather smeared imitation of one of the Churchill views failed entirely in winning the approval of the little artist and critic himself—a sure sign that the boy had either real talent or a pure taste.

"Perhaps, granny," he said, meditatively, as he gave his pencil a suck which might be professional, but certainly was not elegant—"perhaps I might make it more like, if you could just help me a bit now and then, like—like father used."

"But, you see, I don't know anything about it, dear; you must get on as well as you can by yourself at present."

The old woman's eyes were soft and gentle behind her spectacles, as she sat close to the child, knitting him stockings, and watching the progress of his work with the greatest interest, and the most pleasant and unconcealed ignorance of its defects. But his last words made her thoughtful, as his inadvertently uttered wish to learn anything always did.

Ought she to send the boy away to school

at cost of any loneliness to herself, while she knew she could not afford to send him to such a one as she let her thoughts build upon for him? Or ought she to send him every morning into Churchill, where the education would be still more widely different from that one on which she had fixed her hopes for him? For those quiet eyes behind the glasses, could wander miles and miles away beyond the cottage gate, and often did now, seeing wide, dazzling pictures of her boy's after-life; sunny scenes, in which he should work his life's work well and bravely, and where she should leave him some day, that she might go and tell it all to his mother in Heaven, and to some one else who had loved the child, and would remember him even there.

But at present it seemed that the start for him was unattainable. He ought to be at school, and at a good school; yet she could not afford it (for the money old Mr. Dymocke had left him was not to be touched until he came of age). Nor could she either bear to part with him; or to separate

him from Jack Esdaile, who was not going to any public school until his father's return from abroad, and who, as Dorcas full well knew, was the best friend that her boy could have.

It was just as she was thinking of him, that Jack himself came into the room, with his bright, familiar, yet always courteous greeting.

"Mrs. Cheere," he cried, letting his momentarily subdued excitement break out again, "please, I'm come to fetch you and Jet to the Anchorage. Who do you think came to-day? Papa, yes, really papa—my own father, you know, Jet, who's been away for years. Yes, he's come, Mrs. Cheere, and he wants to see you—you and Jet. And the brougham's at the gate, and I'm to wait for you, and not take any refusal. Please come quick, Mrs. Cheere. Make haste, Jet. I long to show you my father. He's——"

The boy was suddenly stayed by the memory which Jet's wistful eyes had awakened. Had it been cruel to talk so gleefully of the return

of his father, to the child whose father never would return? He passed his arm lovingly through Jet's, and whispered to him, with a bright, affectionate smile:

"He wants particularly to see you, Jet. Do you know, he seems as anxious to see *you*, as he was to see me!"

Dorcas donned her best bonnet and muffled herself for the cold drive, then overlooked Jet's muffling.

"You both run down to the carriage while the light is here to guide you," she added, turning out the two little great-coated and comfortered figures; "I'll leave the door open, and follow when I've put out the lamp and locked up."

"I'm glad he's come," she murmured to herself, as she waited to be sure of the last spark dying out, "for many people's sakes. Now, I suppose, Colonel Stuart and Miss Marjorie will be married. I knew she'd never go to be mistress at the Anchorage, to turn out Mrs. Esdaile, though she'd make up all kinds of excuses sooner than let *that* out. Yes, I'm glad enough

he's come, but he can't really want to see us."

The eyes of Mrs. Cheere—so long accustomed to her own small rooms, and small companion, and, more than that, coming straight in from the darkness of the Winter night—were utterly dazzled in the drawing-room at the Anchorage, among what seemed to her a perfect crowd of happy, excited people. It took a good many minutes, and two cups of Mrs. Esdaile's fragrant tea, to fit her to comprehend what they were saying.

"I little thought, as you may guess," said Colonel Stuart, after trying, in his kindly, easy way, to make it clear to her, "that the answer I sent to that 'Next-of-kin' advertisement was destined for my own brother-in-law."

"I was delighted," put in Mr. Esdaile, pleasantly, "to find, when Messrs. Beard and Cartwright forwarded me the letter, that the next-of-kin I sought was to be found in the neighbourhood to which I was soon coming. For that reason I did not answer the letter, wishing to bring the news myself."

"But—but, Colonel Stuart," stammered Dor-

cas, "how can it be? The advertisement was for next-of-kin of—Eustace Jelfrey."

"Yes," answered Mr. Esdaile, with a nod and a smile, "and it was *I* who had it inserted—another proof, isn't it, of the smallness of the world? Let me tell you now what I knew of Eustace Jelfrey," he said, as they all sat listening in the light and warmth. "I was sitting, one day, alone in my tent, writing home, just after deciding to leave the diamond fields altogether, when a man entered in haste and fear, and begged for a little water for his master. I happened to have a little, which I was then boiling to purify, for what we bought was sometimes the very filthiest. By sight I knew this man as the servant (or perhaps more properly the partner) of a young-looking, handsome man who had only lately landed and joined us, yet who had had already quite unprecedented and exceptional success."

"He always succeeded in everything, I think," put in Marjorie Castillain, her bright eyes flashing angrily at the thought.

"But wait, Marjorie," interposed Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "until you hear the end."

"The end," resumed her husband, quietly, "would totally shatter any one's idea of success for him. I do not suppose it could fall to any man's share to witness such a death more than once; but I hope my own may happen before I have to be present at such another."

"Was there no repentance?" asked Colonel Stuart, with his arm round the child, who stood intently listening to this story of his father's death—the father whom he never had, and never could call so.

"No repentance. There was literally no power for it, so all-engrossing and all-dominant was the awful horror. There was not even faith enough for the very weakest thought of penitence. There was only the frantic, hopeless certainty that unknown horrors awaited him, horrors whose grasping power it was too late now to elude; and wild, ceasless crying to know what these horrors could be. And, with these, always that burning, feverish thirst, which could not be appeased. Death had become familiar enough

to me there—as you may judge when I tell you that between thirty and forty died among us every day—but such a death as this, thank God! could never grow to be familiar. It was so long in coming, too; just as if the strength of despair in the man could really keep the dreaded visitant at bay. For sixteen days he fought with fierce strength against the coming of death, and of that doom which he feared after death. I had taken the water to him at first (for I would not keep the man, even while I prepared it) in simple pity. Being used to the fevers that were rife among us, and strong enough always myself, I knew that I should be of use; but from that time I hardly left Jelfrey's tent. I sent away his servant, or partner, or whatever he called himself, and the Kafirs, to stay with my servant; for I could not bear that they should hear the frantic cries of the miserable dying man. It seemed, too, even from the very first, that he liked to have me with him. His eyes would follow me eagerly about the tent, and he would call me, with the passionate fretfulness of a child, if he lost sight of me. But from the

moment he heard my name, and I—in the vain attempt to soothe him—spoke of home and friends in England, this grew even more persistent. When he was conscious, his fear of my leaving him was like that of an infant terrified by the darkness. When delirious, he would spring from his mattress and hold me in a strong grip. In some moods, he would *defy* me to leave him alone in torments. In others, he would appeal to me, sobbing in the utter weakness of his abject terror. But I never wished to leave him. All I wanted, both for him and for myself, my servants brought me to the tent door; and my very anxiety kept me beside him, my great anxiety to tempt him to cry and pray—however far off he felt—for the mercy and compassion of his God."

"Lina," said Marjorie, softly, "you remember that other death-bed? How gladly Eustace Jelfrey then would have changed with his—victim."

"We can feel sure of that," replied Mr. Esdaile, gravely. "No greater agony did man ever witness than this sinner's agony of fear;

on which, now and then, fell another agony, that of feeling what *might* have been. As I told you, from the very first he could not bear me to leave him, simply, I thought, from the fact of my being an Englishman like himself; but after he heard my name, he was still more unwilling to lose sight of me. He knew how my name was connected with his former life; and he knew my friends were among those he had injured. His only relief was in telling me of all this. It seemed as if he must speak of his crimes and faults to me, because he could not speak of them to his Judge. I saw there was hardly one act of his life which he could look back upon without horror, and I wondered sceptically (as I listened through those long, awful nights) why such power had been given to this man. Then I thought what he might have been, if these powers had been used for good. He would have been one to rise among men, and to build himself a name and reputation. As it was, I could only hear how every selfish plan of his had worked the end he wished, and could only think how much more heavily

than upon the ignorant and unlearned, the responsiblity of all this guilt would lie. And this he knew as well as I did."

"Of course he confessed that forgery to you, Mr. Esdaile?" questioned Marjorie.

"Yes; among other things, none of which I need tell you, except that he swam from that pool in the valley almost immediately after—his fall. He had known exactly what his position was when he began to fight, and how the mine lay, and he tempted his antagonist with a view to—to what afterwards occurred. Though that had been no previously arranged plan, the temptation conld not be resisted, and he felt he would leave the neighbourhood himself, if by doing so he could ensure the ruin of—your brother and yourself, Miss Athelston, though he did not speak of you by that name, but by one I knew well, and recognized. He found the valley deserted when he swam to shore, and he fled at once, making his escape cleverly, with the help of timely concealment and disguise, and leaving the foul stain of murder on the man he had wronged. After all these confessions,

and those of the before-time and the after-time, came always the one request which he urged upon me. Would I undertake that the two thousand pounds which he had amassed by his skill and success (as we blindly speak of success), as well as his income of two hundred pounds a year, which he had not been able to claim since his reported murder, should be remitted to his son, of whom he knew literally nothing. So, after his death, I sent my solicitors an advertisement for the *Times*. When the answer to this was forwarded to me, and I found the name and address of Jelfrey's son was furnished me by my own brother-in-law, I determined to wait, and bring the acknowledgment and the news to him myself. So, Jesse,—is not that your name, my little fellow?—you are, you see, the possessor of a fortune of your own, which I shall be glad to hand over, or invest, just as your grandmother advises. She is your guardian now, I hear."

"Granny, Colonel Stuart,"—the child was looking from one to the other in pained bewilderment—"will it be right to take it?

Would—would dad have told me to take it?"

Lina's head was drooped, and both hands went up to hide her eyes.

"Jet," said Neil, gently touching her hands with one of his, and drawing the child to her with the other, "come and ask dad's sister. She will know."

But Marjorie, seeing that Lina could not look up to meet their eyes, answered for her.

"I think we may be glad that Eustace Jelfrey's money can do some good, as he never did any himself. And it will be clearing his memory just a little for us to use it. It will be," added the girl, jumping to pleasant conclusions in her own peculiar style, "it will be like doing him a good turn, and therefore exactly what Gerard Athelston would have done."

"At any rate we shall be acting according to the request of a dying man," added Colonel Stuart, not quite seeing it as Marjorie did, yet knowing how wisely and honourably the father's property could be used for the neglected son,

"and so I feel that we ought to do as Jelfrey asked—eh, Mrs. Cheere?"

"How prosperous Mr. Jelfrey must have been in all he undertook!" put in Mrs. Esdaile.

"Satan is a very remunerative fellow to serve," replied her husband. "He always pays well—in the present."

"How clever Mr. Jelfrey must have been," mused Dorcas, recovering her breath slowly.

"What a different use he might have made of his talents," said Neil, more thoughtfully than anyone guessed.

"Isn't it true that there are no such dreary words in the world as 'it might have been?'"

No one answered Marjorie's half whispered words, because they went too near the hearts of all who were there.

Later on in the evening, as Dorcas prepared to leave, Colonel Stuart detained her.

"We have a proposal to make to you, Mrs. Cheere," he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Esdaile are going to settle in our neighbourhood, I'm delighted to say, and to send Jack to the Bleaborough

Grammar School. No boy could go to a better, as we all know, and as you yourself have often said when we have been talking over 'unattainable wishes.' Well, what do you think of sending Jet too? It is quite in your power now."

"I shall be very glad for the boys not to be separated," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly, noticing how the words that Dorcas wanted to utter would not come from her shaking lips.

"I think it a famous plan," added Mr. Esdaile, seeing this also, and putting in his own cheering words to help her.

"How kind!" faltered Dorcas, presently. "Can you really, really consent for your boy to grow up with—his?"

"We think of him as Gerard's boy," said Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "and we really want you not to separate your little grandson from Jack."

"Sir Gerard Athelston himself would have been glad for them to grow up together," said Colonel Stuart, quietly.

Poor Dorcas! This last and most thoughtful proof of the good opinion of these friends who

had so utterly forgiven and forgotten her complaining discontent, entirely broke down her self-reliance, and she could but let her tears have their own way.

"I cannot help it," she moaned, apologetically, as Jet's caressing little hands drew down hers, and she looked up to meet Marjorie's bright eyes—"I cannot help it, Miss Marjorie. I was thinking if my little girl could only see this prosperity come to her child, and know how good you all are to him, and to me, for his sake —or for the sake of him that was good to us both. I'm a weak and selfish old woman; I've been hard and ill-tempered all my life, but this makes me more of a child than—than my own grandchild."

"And don't you think your little girl *does* see your happiness, and her child's?" whispered Marjorie softly. "I think so."

"Then you will consider our plan, will you?" asked Mr. Esdaile, wishing to cheer her again, "and we will discuss it further presently. I shall be all over the country for the next few days, looking for a house, so we shall be

popping in to see you and arrange this."

"Colonel Stuart—please—Colonel Stuart—"

He had walked aside from the group to ring the bell for the brougham again; and Jet, who had followed him, was gently and modestly trying to win his sole and entire attention. "Colonel Stuart—may I ask you something, please?"

"A hundred things, my lad, if you have a hundred that want answering."

"Colonel Stuart, father didn't kill—Mr. Jelfrey at all, did he?"

"Not at all," was the Colonel's emphatic answer, as he smiled to hear to whom the loving name was given, and to whom the formal title."

"Then, Colonel Stuart, that—that promise, you know, about the monument, doesn't matter now?"

"No, dear," the Colonel answered, pleased that the thought which had struck them all gladly, long before, had come so quickly to the child too.

"And—and, Colonel Stuart, is that money for me, for me to do what I like with, because

—oh! Colonel Stuart, may I—I don't know how to say it—may I do for father what he did for my own mother?"

Clear and bright, the full meaning of the wish flashed into the heart of the listener, and he put his arm about the eager, trembling little speaker, with a sudden dimness even in his own brave eyes.

"You shall do your share, dear little lad," he whispered; "but there are many of us who love his memory so well that we cannot be left out in a task like this. We have been talking of it to-day, but you did not know this when the thought came to you. I am glad of that. Yours shall not be the least share in this, my child, as yours was not the least share in his love and teaching."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN MEMORIAM.

IT was a sweet and calm Spring evening; its very air rich with unspoken thoughts, its very beauty breathing happiness. To Neil Athelston, sitting in the church porch, while the slanting sunbeams lingered tenderly among the graves, there was even another reminder of happiness; for over the iron gates of the churchyard, stretched the foundation of what, upon the morrow, would be a dainty arch of pure white flowers, and which spoke to him of the joy which was to be his. For this morrow was to be his marriage-day—his and Lina's—and not only that, but it was to be Colonel Stuart's and Marjorie's too; and both the brides were to

go from High Athelston, and the magnificent and lavish preparations for the ceremony were understood to be equally in honour of both.

Lady Athelston, and Sir Neil too, had been particular about this; knowing what a failure a festival at the Manor would be, at a time when Marjorie could take no part as hostess. Lady Athelston's will had been in this case purely kind, and (a great deal more astonishing) she had succeeded in working it without assistance.

In her delight at the marriage of her son with the heiress of High Athelston, and the girl she had grown to love so well, the failure of her first scheme for him grew into absolute self-gratulation; and, feeling so thoroughly contented herself, she determined on doing all in her power to add to the happiness of the girl who certainly had never been able to appreciate Neil, but of whom she had always been fond, even though she had never learned to depend and lean upon her, just as she had so soon learned to depend and lean upon the gentle, grave girl, who was to be Neil's wife.

So the sumptuous and gorgeous preparations which she delighted to order were ordered equally for the two brides and the friends of the two brides.

Old Mr. Castillain chuckled a good deal over this, reckoning how many pounds it would save him, yet thanklessly pronouncing it "a whim of the old lady's." And the "old lady's" very kindest and most generous act of all, was her reticence about having any cause for the whim, save her fondness for Marjorie, and great respect for Colonel Stuart. She never pretended to have noticed Louisa's cold, sarcastic words and behaviour about these marriages. She only told her pleasantly that, on the strength of long friendship, she had determined to adopt Marjorie for that occasion, if she and Mr. Castillain would allow her. And of course Louisa, who looked forward herself delightedly to the wedding gaieties at High Athelston, knowing she would be the very handsomest among the twelve bridesmaids, said nothing but that it was "very nice," and then went home to laugh over it with the Squire.

He had been so much put out by the breaking off of the match between his younger daughter and Sir Neil, that he had hardly even yet recovered his temper; but three circumstances went a long way towards enabling him to do so. The first was Sir Neil Athelston's open, fearless declaration that, except the baronetage, he had no claim upon the Athelston lands or wealth; the second was the pleasant financial arrangement Colonel Stuart proposed for his wife (much more interesting to the old gentleman than the manly declaration of love); and the third was the expense of the wedding being saved for him.

So it was that Neil's mother—always led by some one—had so long now been led by wise and unsuspicious hands, that this thoughtful, generous reserve seemed only natural to her; and working her own will kindly, she was loved the better for insisting on it.

If Lina had been consulted, she would have chosen what is called "a quiet wedding," but on this subject she never *was* consulted, except in gay defiance of her choice; and she under-

stood at once Lady Athelston's generous, as well as proud, desire that all splendour should be shed upon the marriage of her only son.

"The county people will expect it, my dear; and it is due from us, in our position here, to gratify them. I wish them all to see what rejoicing I make over his marriage with the dear little friend from whom I was once tempted to turn suspiciously. And" (with a smile) "why should Marjorie have a 'quiet wedding,' when she never has been at all a quiet person?"

So the morrow of this sweet Spring evening was to be such a day as Churchill had but rarely seen. There were arches of evergreens (blossoming flags and mottoes) both at the foot and summit of the steep street; flags waved all round the quaint old pump and lamp-post midway; and there was to be (the only one left until the morrow) a magnificent arch of Spring flowers and dainty fern, above the leopards passants on the entrance gates at High Athelston.

Besides that, there was a restless, expectant spirit of excitement rife everywhere; from the wealthy aristocratic families of Highshire, who

would all be represented at High Athelston on the morrow 'to the cottagers' children, who were out of doors now, watching the progress of the preparations; from the shopkeepers and private families in Churchill, who were all inclined to take holiday and join the universal merry-making, to the workmen and labourers who had it given them, and would have substantial cause to make the day a festival.

And Marjorie was to be as a daughter of the house at High Athelston through these few hours, and was to leave it a bride, as honoured and petted as was the little mistress who had never claimed or even owned that title.

Sir Neil sat quite still in the shadowy porch, looking out upon the tender, sunlit green of the Spring trees, and thinking, in the stillness of his great gratitude, of the happiness which had been given to him. And the deep and pure content which filled his heart, shone in his eyes, and made them beautiful indeed in their long, long, quiet gaze.

"Alone, Athelston?"

The dream was broken by this greeting, as

Colonel Stuart came round the porch from a side path.

"Marjorie forbade me to go to Hawkedale to-day," he explained, as he leaned opposite Sir Neil, against the old stone porch. "She said she wished to spend her last day at home undisturbed; but she confessed that, as they drove to High Athelston, she should dismount here, if Louisa would allow her, and stop a few minutes to show Jet the monument. She promised him, so I know she will come. If to-morrow were her wedding-day a hundred times over, she would not forget her promise to a child."

"We hoped to see her at High Athelston earlier to-day," said Neil, smiling assent to the Colonel's last words, "at least, I did. Lina was always sure she would wish to spend to-day at home. Now she will only arrive with Louisa among a host of other guests, not before yourself, I hope, Stuart."

"Thank you. But what a crowd of us you are entertaining to-night! It is too bad, considering what High Athelston is going to do to-morrow."

"We like it," said Neil, genially. "You should see my mother's lively delight in the anticipation, and her indefatigable system of improvement in everything. She never will, I am sure, leave off issuing improved editions of every order, until it is too late to issue an order at all; and does she not act her part well now—in spite of her sad deafness?"

"Wonderfully well," assented the Colonel, with heartiness, "and she looks happy enough to make us all so. Her strength is steadily returning, I'm rejoiced to see."

"Worry always pulled her down," smiled Neil, "and ease has plucked her up; ease and Lina."

"Is Miss Athelston within?" asked the Colonel, glancing at the closed church door.

"Yes. I knew she would like to be alone when she first saw Gerard's monument. Even to myself, this morning, it was most sad, with its beauty and its associations; to her I knew it would be so—especially to-day. After to-day, Stuart, there will be no grief or sadness of hers—as there will be no joy, I trust—which may not be mine too."

"After to-day," echoed the Colonel, with quiet gladness in his tone. "Neil, dear fellow, I can hardly believe it even yet."

"I can," answered Sir Neil, with a quick brilliance in his eyes. "And I catch myself pitying everyone I meet, because they cannot have my happiness. Fool, eh, Stuart?"

But the Colonel was far enough from endorsing this, when he saw how the brightness of the young man's self-congratulation was not dimmed by one atom of self pride.

At this moment the great Hawkedale britzka drove up to the gates, but apparently Miss Castillain did not relish the idea of waiting there, for the carriage drove on towards High Athelston, while Marjorie and little Jet walked together through the churchyard.

"I did obey you, Marjorie," began the Colonel, taking her hand with a glad smile of greeting; "but I could not resist coming to meet you here."

"May Jet go in to Lina, Marjorie?" questioned Neil, softly, as they came into the cool, dim porch. "She will like to show the

monument to Gerard's boy, and we have all seen it."

Neil opened the door for the child, as he spoke; then they three waited together, Marjorie seating herself in a corner of the old seat.

Presently Jet came back to them, his step slower and softer even than usual, his eyes wet, and his lips twitching.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" he cried, his hands locked in Marjorie's lap, as he looked up into her face through his tears. "Oh, it's beautiful! and I'm so glad. I'm so glad it's beautiful—oh, father!"

The little shaking figure was clasped in Marjorie's arms, and the broken words were stayed with kisses.

"It is beautiful, dear, because it is like him."

When the suddenly-renewed passion of grief was quieted, Jet raised his face again wistfully.

"Miss Marjorie, now may I tell granny to come? She does so want to come this evening —by herself, before she comes to-morrow, when

the church will be so beautiful and full. May I tell her now?"

As the child left the porch, Neil entered the church alone, and, standing a moment just within the door, looked with eyes full of love and sympathy at the slight figure, leaning with its face hidden against the curtained rail of the great Athelston pew.

Then his glance rested upon the splendid monument above. Prominent even among the Athelston, was this one at which he gazed, while he walked slowly up the white carpeted aisle. The exquisite marble figure of Gerard Athelston, life-like in its attitude and expression, was beautiful, just as he had been beautiful; though the marble might be whiter and colder than death, while to him had always belonged essentially the warmth of happiness and the healthful strength of manhood. Though chiselled only from a photograph, the figure was life-like in its resemblance, as well as exquisite in its easy grace and winning beauty. On the marble column beside it, was engraved the simple inscription—

SACRED TO
THE LOVED AND CHERISHED MEMORY OF
SIR GERARD DYMOCKE ATHELSTON,
BARONET, OF HIGH ATHELSTON,
ONLY SON OF SIR GERARD ATHELSTON,
AND MAGDALEN HIS FIRST WIFE.
Born September 19th, 1842: Died May 31st, 1871.
"HE THAT JUDGETH ME IS THE LORD."

Neil's eyes lingered to the last upon the words; then he took Lina's drooping figure in his arms, and woke her to his presence with a long and tender kiss.

"Lina, my darling, there is no name in all our line, long as that is, which we can be proud of as we must always be of his. But I can hope *now* that there may be others, some day, worthy to inherit it from him. Does it give you pain to read it, dearest?"

"No," she answered, looking up with a steadfast calm in her beautiful, dark eyes; "no, it was not pain. Looking there seems to strengthen me—almost as his words used to strengthen me—that is why I stayed so long."

"Alick," whispered Marjorie, as she, too, and Colonel Stuart, came softly up and stood before the monument, "I am glad to feel it will be here to-morrow. To think of *him* will be good for me, even then."

"And for me too," he answered, clasping tightly the hand that lay in his. "It will always be good for me, recalling, as it does, the life a man *may* lead—through good report or evil."

"HE THAT JUDGETH ME IS THE LORD."

For a few minutes they were all silent, in the Holy silence of the place, reading once more those words which had had the power of bringing Gerard back, to meet, with calm and trustful bravery, the judgment of his fellow-men.

THE END.

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